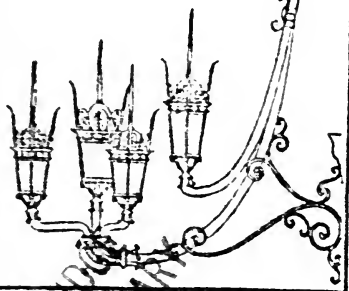




THE BIG TENT

FLAVIA CAMP CANFIELD

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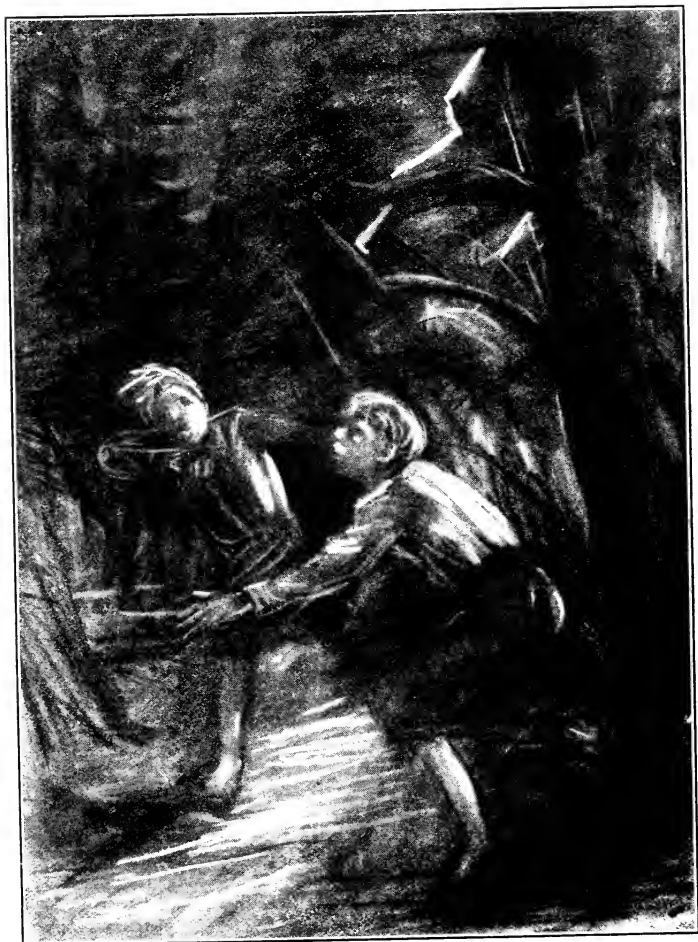
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THE STORM

THE BIG TENT

BY
FLAVIA CAMP CANFIELD

AUTHOR OF
"THE REFUGEE FAMILY," "THE KIDNAPPED CAMPERS."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR



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TO MY ONLY GRANDDAUGHTER
SALLY CANFIELD FISHER

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THE BIG TENT

CHAPTER I

THE STORM

AB and Addy walked along the sandy road with many "ohs" and "ows," for the weather was very hot, and the stones in their path burned their bare feet. A small brown and white terrier followed them soberly, his little red tongue hanging from his mouth, and panting, for he too was suffering from the heat.

"I wish't you'd a' let me wear my old shoes," said Addy complainingly as she limped to one side to walk on the brown burned-out grass.

"Oh shucks! Addy, don't be such a baby," returned her sister impatiently. "'Taint mor'n a half mile to the woods, and then we'll be cool enough, and you know Uncle Jake said there was a nice cold spring there."

"All right, Ab, I guess I can stand it," said Addy, her face brightening, "but I most wisht I

hadn't brought so much truck along. This hump on my back's gettin' awful heavy."

" 'Taint any heavier'n mine," returned Ab, "I guess we'll need all we've got if we stay all winter—and I s'pose we will."

"Oh," wailed Addy, the tears coming to her eyes. "I just hate to go to live with strangers. I wish't Aunt Clara could a kep' us."

"Don't cry, Addy—it don't do any good," said her sister kindly, "I wouldn't wonder if we liked it at Mr. Higgins after we get acquainted. You know Aunt Clara says they're awful nice folks."

Addy wiped her eyes and spoke more cheerfully. "Well, perhaps we will. Anyway, it'll be nice to go to school again."

"Course!" said Ab emphatically, "that's just why we're goin'. Aunt Clara said she wouldn't think of sendin' us away if they'd a had a decent school in their district."

The green woods were in sight now, and forgetting their heavy packs and the blistering stones, the children ran for its cool shelter, followed closely by the little dog. They soon found the spring close to the forest path, and after drinking of its cold water and bathing their hot

sunburned faces and hands, they sat on the ground under the tall pines to rest and eat their luncheon. Like all healthy children and dogs, the three had keen appetites, so that the bread and butter, fried chicken and doughnuts taken from their knapsacks soon disappeared. Addy was quite contented and happy now. She was no longer hungry, her heavy knapsack was off her tired shoulders, her bruised feet were buried in soft, damp moss, and she was with her best friends—

“Ain’t this nice, Ab,” she said, as she lay at full length on the ground with Puck curled up beside her. “I wish’t we could stay here all day.”

“Well, there’s no hurry,” said Ab. “It’s only three miles from here to Mr. Higgins, and we don’t have to get there till dark—we can stay here till we’re good and rested.”

Addy sighed contentedly, and her sweet round face and bright curling yellow hair made her look very much like a cherub, as she gazed with her blue eyes wide open, into the green depths of the pine needles above her.

Ab pushed back from her forehead her thick brown hair, and began with a jackknife to make

a willow whistle. Her sharp dark eyes were fixed on her work, but she was thinking of how much money she and Addy could make by picking berries for the hotels. They both needed new clothes before they went to school in the fall and they would have to earn the money to buy them. Aunt Clara couldn't do it. She had her own family to provide for, and she was poor. Ab was only ten years old, but she was thoughtful beyond her years, and could see that in spite of the kindness of Aunt Clara and Uncle Jacob, she and her sister were burdens in that crowded household. There was enough to eat on the little rocky farm, but very little money. New dresses and shoes were hard to get for her cousins, and she couldn't expect Aunt Clara to buy them for her and Addy. She especially wanted fine shoes for them both. They had never worn any but coarse and clumsy ones in winter, going barefooted in the summer months. She couldn't bear to think that in the new place where they were going, they would have to dress almost like "poor house" children unless some one gave them some money or they could earn it. Her little sister seemed to guess what she was thinking about, for she said suddenly,

“Do you s’pose, Ab, Mr. Higgins will buy us some new dresses and shoes?”

“No, course not,” said Ab, looking up from her task, “Aunt Clara said we’d have to wear our old things next winter. Mr. Higgins is only going to give us our board, and we’ve got to wash dishes and do chores to pay for it.”

“Oh, dear! I wisht I could have some slippers like Lizzie Clines’. I’m so ’shamed of my old shoes. One of ’em’s got a hole in the side, another one’s comin’,” said Addy ruefully.

“Never mind, Addy, we’ll get some nice shoes someway,” said the older sister cheerfully.

The whistle was now finished and Ab blew a long blast on it which made the little dog jump up and bark excitedly. The girls laughed and Ab said that would be a good way to call him back when he ran away from them in the woods. They practised to see how it would work. Addy took the dog some distance away, Ab blew on the whistle and Puck barked loudly, bounding toward the sound. The children agreed that the new whistle was a great success, and would probably be very useful to them; and then strapping their knapsacks on their backs and carrying their jackets on

their arms, started on their journey. As they had all the afternoon before them they decided to have some fun as they went along. They climbed trees like squirrels, peeping into birds' nests, they chased chipmunks to their holes, and picked and ate raspberries until their hands and faces were stained crimson; and at last settled down to build a dam in a brook. They were so busy at this work, that they did not notice, at first, that there had been a change in the weather. It became suddenly darker and cooler and a wind rose and shook the treetops over their heads.

"Why I b'lieve we're goin' to have a thunder storm," cried Ab, running into a little cleared space where she could see the sky.

It looked very dark and threatening and the clouds were moving fast, lightning began to flash and the thunder was almost deafening.

"Oh, what shall we do!" cried Addy anxiously and beginning to cry.

"Clip it as fast as we can," said Ab, slinging her knapsack over her shoulder and grabbing her coat. "Come on, Addy," she called, "and stop your crying, or you can't see anything—and stick close to me."

The wind was blowing a furious gale now, and the thunder and lightning were incessant. The children ran swiftly along the beaten path, dodging the boughs which the wind had torn from the trees and sent flying in all directions. The rain fell in torrents, wetting them to the skin. It was almost as dark as night now. They could not see the path and began to rush on aimlessly, losing their way, and going round and round in circles, and finally they stopped, clinging close together, the dog pressing against their legs. "We're lost," said Ab. "We'd better stand still till it gets a little lighter, and then we can find our way by my compass—we've got to go north, you know, wherever we are."

"Where is your compass?" asked Addy. "Did you put it in your pocket?"

"No, it's tied by a string to my jacket." And then the sisters realized that both their coats and hats were lost—probably brushed from their shoulders and heads by the thickets and vines through which they had scrambled; and just then a terrible stroke of lightning blinded them, and they both fell to the ground unconscious.

CHAPTER II

NIGHT IN THE WOODS

ADDY opened her eyes and looked around in a dazed way. Ab was lying near by with her eyes closed, and Puck was whining. A large tree not far away was split all the way down its great trunk, and lay a perfect wreck. When the child saw this she knew it had been struck by lightning, and that she and her companions had also felt the shock, and had been lying unconscious for hours. The rain was over, and the sun shining. She could tell by its slanting beams that it was late in the afternoon. She rose to her feet, and went to Ab, whom she tried to waken. But the little girl seemed to be in a stupor and would not open her eyes. Addy was terrified. If an older person had been there she would have felt utterly helpless and unable to think clearly. But there was no one to tell her what to do, and she knew something ought to be done at once. Looking at Ab's face again she saw a lump on her forehead which she concluded must have been made

by a falling limb. Many of them were lying about. She had no idea where they were. They had run a long distance in their terror, and might be far from either the uncle's home or Mr. Higgins' home. If she could find water she thought she might waken Ab by throwing it in her face. She had seen a fainting girl revived in that way. There were springs everywhere on the mountain. She was sure she could get water if she looked about a little.

She could not hear any sound of a running brook, so she thought she would have to go some distance away. She was afraid to do this for fear she could not find her way back. Then it occurred to her that she could cut pieces of bark off trees near any paths she might take, leaving white spots on their trunks as a guide. Uncle Jacob did that sometimes. He called it "blazing a trail." But Ab's knife had gone with the compass, and her own had been lost on the farm. She would have to think of some other way.

While she was turning this problem in her mind, Puck limped to her side and put his head in the little girl's lap. He too had been hurt in the storm and whined as though in pain when one

of his paws was touched. Addy fed him some of the luncheon which she took from the knapsack. Fortunately this bag had been strapped so strongly to her back that it had not gone with her hat and jacket. She also found in the knapsack, among other treasures, a ball of strong twine, and the plan came to her then, of tying Puck to a tree near Ab. She would then be able to go out of sight of the spot where they were, and make a circuit in search of water. When she wished to return she could whistle to Puck. This precious whistle was in the pocket of her dress, and she was sure the dog's barking in reply would tell her where to find her companion.

She fastened the string firmly to the collar of the little dog, and tied him securely to a tree. She then laid the luncheon which they had saved for supper, and other articles on the ground, and taking her empty knapsack and Ab's, started off on her search. She whistled when she had gone a short distance out of sight, and as she expected, Puck barked and whined loudly. There was no doubt now that the plan would work well. She could hear the barking a long distance away.

But, fortunately, she did not have to go far be-

fore she found a spring. The knapsacks were made of strong denim, and lined with oil cloth. She filled them with water and found to her delight that they did not leak. She could thank her thoughtful Aunt Clara for that. She did everything well. Puck had kept on barking, so that Addy, guided by the sound, had no trouble in finding her way back without any delay. She hung the bags on the low limb of a tree so that the water would not spill; and taking one of her shoes from the knapsack and using it as a cup, began to dash the cold spring water, with a good deal of force into the face of her unconscious sister. It seemed to make no impression at first, but she persisted until every drop from the two bags was gone.

By that time Ab's eyelids seemed to flutter a little. Addy ran to the spring breathlessly, and hurried back with a new supply. She was full of hope now, and kept on pelting Ab's head and shoulders with water until finally the latter gasped, and raised her arm to protect her face. Addy cried out joyfully and kneeling down began to rub Ab's arms and legs and body until more signs of life appeared, and she was able finally to

sit up, leaning against a tree, and open her eyes. She did not seem to be really awake though, and Addy could not make her talk or eat. Before long she tumbled over and seemed to go to sleep. But her face had lost its deathly look. It had some color, and Addy felt comforted by the belief that the sleep was now a natural one, and would probably be the best thing for her.

She went to the spring for water for herself and Puck, and ate some of the food. There was no doubt now, that they would have to stay there all night. She must try to keep Ab warm. It was growing dark and chilly. She would have to do something at once. Her little tin case of matches was in her pocket, and she decided that she must have a fire. She knew how dangerous it was to light one among pine trees, but she was sure she could be careful enough to prevent any harm. She made a circle of stones and started a fire in the center, feeding it with dead limbs and bark.

It certainly seemed far less lonely and dreadful when she could see the bright friendly flames and felt their warmth on her chilled little body.

It was not easy to take off Ab's wet clothing, but she managed it at last, drying one garment at-

a time, and putting it again on the sleeping child. She then gathered enough spruce boughs to cover them both, and lay down with the dog in her arms—as close to Ab as possible, so that their bodies would help keep her warm.

Addy had no intention of going to sleep. She was sure to stay awake, she thought to watch for any change in Ab—and keep the fire burning. She dared not make a large one, and her small fire needed constant feeding. But she was very tired and sleepy, and could not keep her eyes open. She slept for several hours and then woke with a start.

It was very dark. The only thing she could see was the light from a few live coals of the burned-out fire. She jumped up and put some leaves and twigs on these, and made a flame which showed Ab's pale sleeping face, lying near Puck's little brown head.

It was very lonesome to be the only one awake, but she tried bravely not to be frightened as she sat there, it seemed to her a long time, and listened to the dismal hooting of an owl in a tree and the crackling noises in the underbrush around them.

At last she thought she heard human voices

near,—speaking in low tones. She peered into the darkness and listened tremblingly. Finally, she called out, “Who’s there!” and at once a roughly dressed man and a boy about seventeen years old, came forward into the light of the fire.

CHAPTER III

TOM AND NICK

“**D**ON'T be afraid, kid, we ain't a goin' to hurt ye,” said the big man kindly.

“But I don't know who you are, or how you got here,” said Addy still trembling.

“Well, I'm Tom, and this is Nick. The boss sent us up here to buy horses, and we got caught in the storm,” returned the stranger in such a friendly voice that Addy trusted him at once, and began to tell her story wildly.

The man interrupted her with questions which the child answered clearly enough for the newcomers to understand very soon what had happened.

“I see,” said Tom. “I guess you all got a touch of the lightnin' that struck the tree. It's a wonder it didn't kill ye. Is the other one alive?” he asked the boy he had called Nick, who was bending over Ab.

“Yes, her heart's beatin' yet, but that's about

all ye can say. I guess she ought to be took to a doctor pretty quick," replied Nick.

Tom drew his companion to one side and said in a low voice, "What we goin' to do with the little rats? If we take 'em home we'll be too late gittin' back, and if we leave 'em, the littlest one'll die sure."

"We'll have to take 'em to a doctor as quick's we can, and trust to luck to git 'em home after that," said Nick.

"But there'll be a great hunt and hulabaloo for 'em," objected his companion. "The job's too risky, we'll be overhauled I'm afraid, and yet it ain't human to go off and leave 'em."

"We might take 'em to the first house we come to and leave 'em," said Nick, "only the trouble is it takes hours in the country to git a doctor, and this kid orter have one quick."

"Well, what shall we do?" said Tom helplessly.

"Take 'em to Ma Brown," said Nick suddenly inspired. "She'll git Doc Kelly double quick."

"Well, you have got a head on you, for such a fool lookin' chap," said Tom, laughing, "I guess that plan'll work all right, and we'd better start as soon's we can."

“Yes,” assented Nick, “we better git a move on us. There ain’t no time to lose.”

Ab was still unconscious, and lay as though dead. It seemed to be useless to try to waken her. Tom shook her vigorously and lifted her to her feet, but the child sank back to the ground and lay there motionless. Nick brought water from the spring in a folding cup he carried with him, and adding a little whiskey from a flask, they made Ab swallow the mixture. It seemed to revive her somewhat, so that she sat up and looked around, but she was too weak to talk or stand, and in a moment closed her eyes and lay down again.

“I’ll lug her to the horses,” said Tom, taking the child in his strong arms. “You come along with the other kid.”

“But where are we going?” asked Addy in dismay.

“Don’t you worry, we’ll take good care of you,” said Tom, hurrying along.

There seemed nothing else to do, so they all scrambled down the mountain side to a level spot where they found two large brown horses tied to a tree. Tom mounted one of them, and Dick placed Ab in front of him in such a way that the

child's head rested on the breast of the big man.

"You can ride behind me I guess," said Nick, jumping on to the back of the other horse, and turning to Addy.

"But where is Puck to ride?" asked she anxiously.

"He can run along after us."

"No, he's lame. He can't run, he'll have to ride," returned Addy, picking the dog up in her arms.

"We can't take lame dogs along with us," said Nick impatiently. "Come! hurry up or Tom'll git ahead of us."

"No, I'll not stir a step without him," declared Addy. "If you won't take him I'll walk all the way and carry him."

Nick tried roughly to take the dog from her, but Addy hung on firmly, crying and screaming excitedly, and Tom turned round, saying angrily, "Stop that kid's noise, can't ye, Nick."

"Come on then with yer blame dog," said Nick, laughing. "I suppose ye want me to carry him like a baby while ye stick on behind."

Addy was very grateful and happy now, and hastened to place the suffering little dog in

Nick's arms, and then climbed up to the broad back of the steady old horse.

They soon joined Tom and together they trotted down the winding road in the early morning light. They passed several quiet farm houses when they reached the valley, and Addy soon saw that they were in a country she had never seen before.

"Why, ain't we going home?" she asked in dismay.

"No, it's too far off. We want to git a doctor as soon as we can for the other kid," said Nick.

"Where are we going?" asked Addy dubiously.

"It ain't far, we're goin' to take you to a nice old woman. She'll fix ye up in fine shape, and there's a doctor right there to tend to her," pointing to Ab.

Addy was much pleased and relieved by this reasonable plan. She felt sure it was best to go as fast as possible to the nearest doctor, and now to find a kind old woman to take care of Ab seemed too good to be true.

"You can write, can't ye?" asked Nick.

"Yes, a little," replied Addy.

“Ye’d better write yer aunt’s name and address in this book so I can make sure to git it right,” said Nick, producing an old notebook and pencil. “When we git there I’ll write her and tell her where ye be.”

This pleased Addy very much, for she believed that Aunt Clara would come for them as soon as she got the letter and their troubles would all be ended. After that the big horses carried them quickly over the smooth roads until they came, about five o’clock in the morning, to the town where a big circus was staying for the day.

The party could look down on the encampment on a level spot some distance away from any houses, but they were too far off to hear sounds. A big white tent was rising from the ground with a host of men, looking no larger than flies, pulling ropes and driving stakes. There was also a long shed which seemed to be made of gray canvas into which horses were being led. There were a great many loaded wagons moving about, and hundreds of men and boys seemed to be running against each other without any particular object.

Ab’s eyes were closed and she took no notice

of anything, but Addy was greatly excited and interested. She had once been with a big boy cousin to see a circus come into town, and had watched the tents go up, and seen the wagons with animals driven into them.

It had been a fascinating experience which she remembered vividly, and one she had often longed to have repeated.

She ventured to ask her companion if they were going near the big tent, and if they could stop a few minutes to see it go up.

Nick laughed good naturedly as he said, "I guess you'll git enough of it, kid. Ma Brown's in the circus."

CHAPTER IV

MA BROWN

ADDY had noticed two long railway trains standing on a track some distance from the tents, and nearer the town. Tom and Nick turned their horses in the direction of these trains, going through a side street which was lined on both sides with trees and shrubs, where they lost sight of the encampment entirely.

Presently they turned out of the shaded street and found themselves near one of the long trains, which was made up of a dozen cars, each about half as long as the ordinary "Pullman." The train was standing in a quiet spot, where the hammering and shouting at the circus tents could be only faintly heard—they were so far away. The fresh morning air stirred gently the pretty lace curtains of an open window of the first car, near where the horses were stopped. As the party listened quietly they heard, very distinctly, several loud snores.

“That’s Ma Brown,” said Tom in a whisper. “I thought that was her winder. How shall we wake her and not have the Madam hear us?”

“Ossileny sleeps in the next car,” said Nick. “She won’t wake if we don’t make too much noise.”

As he spoke he threw a small handful of gravel through the window. It rattled on something hard, and a parrot immediately began scolding.

The snoring stopped, a bed creaked, and a wheezy voice said in a low tone—“What’s the matter, you old tyke. What waked you up so early?”

“Ma Brown! Ma Brown!” called Tom in a hoarse whisper.

“Why, that sounds like Tom!” said the wheezy voice. “Where be ye, and what d’ye want?”

“Come to the winder a minit,” said Tom.

There was a moment’s delay and bustle—Ma Brown was evidently searching for a garment. Presently she appeared at the window looking very sleepy and holding a wrapper together at her throat.

She was not young. Her round fat face was sunburned, and her pug nose was covered with

freckles. Her gray hair was twisted in a small hard knot at the back of her head and her eyes were faded. Ma Brown was not handsome, but she looked so kind and good that Addy loved her the moment she saw her.

The sleepy look faded when her eyes fell on the group outside.

“My goodness sakes alive!” she exclaimed. “Where on earth did ye find them poor little tads?”

“They was lost in the woods, and we picked ’em up and brought ’em here for you to take care of ’em,” said Nick.

“Oh, that’s you, is it, Henny? I didn’t see you at first,” said Ma Brown. “Bring the little critters round to the door. I’ll be there to open it fur ye. My! my! my!” she exclaimed as the children were brought into her snug little sitting room. “They both look like they’d been through the wars. Somebody must have abused ’em terrible.”

“They came from a farm on the mountain, and live kinder rough with their uncle,” said Nick in a low tone.

“Yes, and I s’pose gittin lost that way, they



“WHERE ON EARTH DID YOU FIND THEM POOR
LITTLE TADS!”

got all scratched up and dirty. They must be awful hungry."

"They seem to hev got struck by lightnin' in the storm yesterday. This one's the worst off," said Tom, placing Ab on a broad comfortable lounge. "I guess you'd orter hev the doctor from her looks."

"My suds! I should say so." Ma Brown placed the little girl's head on a soft pillow as she spoke and Ab moaned a little, though her touch had been as gentle as possible.

"She looks most dead," she went on, glancing at the pale haggard face. "Tom, you hike over to Doc Kelly's car, and tell him to come here as quick's he can leg it."

"You can't git him to stir so early as this," objected Tom.

"Yes, you can," said shé, pushing him to the door. "Tell him I want him right quick. It's a case of life and death, and he must come a-run-nin'."

Tom started on his errand and Ma Brown darted for a bottle of camphor which was standing on a shelf, and putting some of it on Ab's face, very gently said in a crooning voice, "Poor

little girlie, she's had a nawful time, hasn't she? But never mind! Ma Brown's got her now. She'll take good care of her and she'll be all well pretty soon. What's your name, sis?" she said turning to Addy.

"Adelaide Stanton," said the child. "But everybody calls me Addy."

"Well, that's a right pretty name; and is this your sister?"

"Yes, and her name's Abigail, but we call her Ab."

"Is that so? Well, that's a nice name, too. Well now, Addy, you ain't hurt, so you put the little dog down and come here and hold the bottle to this little girl's nose, till I git some clothes on agin the doctor comes."

Addy took the bottle, and she said hurriedly to Nick, who still lingered at the door: "You run and wake Cindy. Tell her I want her quick."

"Where'll I find her?" asked Nick.

"She's in Loly's car, next to this. Be sure ye don't wake Loly. She's ben havin' a nawful headache, and she's as nervous as a witch."

"How'll I wake Cindy?"

Ma Brown took down a feather duster from a

hook on the wall, and said, handing it to the boy, "Here, take this. Reach into the left of the first winder ye come to, and brush about. Ye can't see nothin', but it'll tickle her face, and she'll wake up and think it's me. That's the way I call her."

Nick started with the feather duster, and Ma Brown dressed her short, squat person in a walking skirt and dressing sacque which she was buttoning as the doctor entered the door breathless and half dressed. He was a big square-shouldered fellow with a ruddy complexion and sharp blue eyes, and seemed, in his billowing pink bath robe to make the tiny room look smaller than ever.

"What's up, Ma Brown," he asked anxiously. "You got one of your bad spells?"

"I'm all right, Doc, but I want ye should do somethin' right quick for this poor little child."

"Well, Ma Brown!" said the young man, looking disgusted. "I call that a pretty mean trick to roust me out at five o'clock in the morning for one of your little beggars. Why didn't you call Jones?"

"Now, Teddy, don't you be naughty," said Ma

Brown coaxingly. "You know I can't trust Jones. I wouldn't a sent for you if 'twan't necessary. These young ones ain't beggars. They're little country girls. They got lost on the mountain, and their folks don't know where they be. Tom and Henny brought 'em here, 'cause it's the nearest place, and this one's awful bad off. Tom thinks she's ben struck by lightnin'. You tend to her quick now to please me."

"Oh, of course, Ma. We all have to please you," said the young surgeon good naturedly.

The girls were both asleep now. Addy had dropped the camphor bottle and was sitting on a stool with Puck in her arms near the couch where Ab lay. They looked forlorn and forsaken, with torn and soiled clothes, grimy faces and hands, and wounds and bruises all over them.

"I can't tell much about her till some of this dirt's washed off," said the doctor, bending over Ab. "Can't you give her a bath, Ma Brown? Then I'll see what can be done for her. I'll be back pretty quick as soon as I can get dressed."

But Ma Brown stopped him, saying, "Now, don't you go and leave me, Teddy. I'm afraid the little thing's dead or near to it. She looks

like she hadn't any too much breath in her."

The doctor laughed. "Oh, she's all right. You can't kill a young one. But I'll stay to put her in the tub. She's too heavy for you to lift."

Just then a young and very black negress appeared—looking sleepy and surly.

"What ye want, Mis' Brown?" she said crossly.

"Go and get the bath tub half full of warm water, Cindy," said her mistress. "And hurry up as fast as you can."

"Tell her to bring some warm milk after that," said the doctor, beginning to undress Ab.

The child opened her eyes when she was put in the water, but closed them again soon, seeming to be unconscious. Ma Brown dried her little body tenderly with soft towels and the doctor began his examination.

"Nothing the matter that I can see," he said in a few moments. "She's had a tough experience which has been too much for her nerves. Probably got a little too much electricity into her during the storm. Give her milk now and let her sleep. She'll come out all right."

Cindy came with a glass of milk now, which she gave to Ab under Ma Brown's directions. The

girl seemed better natured, and said kindly, as she lifted the little girl's head: "Here, honey, let Cindy give ye some nice milk."

Ab wakened enough to drink, and closed her eyes again, while Ma Brown put on to her a clean white night gown.

The doctor then laid her in the bed, and turned to Addy, who roused as soon as she was touched.

"Here's the doctor to see if yer hurt bad," said Ma Brown. "But we'll have to wash ye first. It'll make ye feel a lot better. Let Ma Brown unbutton yer little jacket."

"Oh, I ain't hurt," said Addy. "I'm all right. But Puck's lame: won't you do something for him, doctor?"

"Well, I call that one too many," said the doctor laughing heartily. "To be turned out of bed at this unholy hour to tend a sick dog. I wouldn't have thought it of you, Ma Brown."

"Oh, come now, Teddy, 'twon't hurt ye a speck to do something for this sweet little girl's doggie. Don't you see how she loves him?"

The tears were running over Addy's grimy cheeks, and her eyes were raised imploringly to the doctor's face.

"Ye can't stand that, Doc. Ye know ye can't with your soft heart," said Ma Brown.

"None of your palaver, Ma Brown. It's too early in the morning for that," said the young man, patting her pudgy hand affectionately. "There's nothing the matter with the child, I guess. Give her a bath and nourishing food and let her sleep. I'll take the dog over to the hospital. Doc Reeves'll fix him up."

But Addy hesitated about giving up her pet when the doctor tried to take him, until Ma Brown said, "Let him go, honey. They'll cure him right away in the hospital. There's a fine doctor there that tends to all the circus animals."

Addy was satisfied now, and gave up Puck cheerfully, and then took her bath and glass of milk. She was soon sound asleep by the side of Ab, and neither of the children knew when their gentle hostess bandaged their wounds and put on the cooling, healing stuff the doctor sent over for the purpose.

"Now, you go and git yer brekfus', Mis' Brown. I'll stay with these poor little young ones till youse gits back," said the black girl.

"I'm afraid Loly'll need ye, Cindy," said Ma

Brown, wiping the perspiration from her face, as she sat down to rest for a moment.

“No, she told me not to ’sturb her till nine o’clock. She had a powerful bad night, and she’s cross as the old boy hisself.”

“She ain’t never cross, Cindy. You know that. She’s jest nervous, poor child,” said Ma Brown reproachfully. “But I guess I’ll run over and get a cup o’ coffee. I won’t be gone long.”

The dining tent of the employees was not far away, and Ma Brown had time for a comfortable breakfast, and Cindy ate hers before her mistress needed the services of a maid.

CHAPTER V

MADAME LOLA OSSILENA

MADAME OSSILENA woke quite refreshed at nine o'clock, with her headache gone, and took, with a good-natured smile, from Cindy's hand, a dainty tray with a nice hot chop and a cup of coffee.

She looked very handsome in her lace-trimmed night gown as she leaned luxuriously on some large pillows her maid placed at her back. Her blonde hair was short and curly, her eyes were bright blue, and her fair complexion, her straight nose and red lips—all made her look like a large expensive doll.

While she was eating her breakfast Cindy laid out her clothing ready to dress her, and then began to put the richly furnished room in neat order. The walls were covered with bright oil paintings in showy gold frames: elaborate lace curtains hung over the windows, and all the space on the floor was overcrowded with elegant upholstered furniture, so that it was sometimes dif-

ficult to move about without stumbling over things. Except that the room was narrow, with low ceiling, it was hard to believe that it was on wheels, and was hauled all over the country from day to day.

“How’s Ma this morning, Cindy? You’ve been over to see her, haven’t you?” asked Madame Ossilena, as she drained her coffee cup.

“Yes’m.” The black girl giggled. “She’s well, I reckon. She’s been right smaht busy this mornin’. She’s got two sick kids in her bed, and I’ve been helpin’ her take keer of ’em.”

“For the land’s sake! Ma’s crazy! I never see her beat. Where on earth did they come from?” said the mistress in an irritated voice.

“I dunno. She jest told me they got lost on the mountain somewheres round here, and that meachin feller they calls Imp found ’em and brought ’em in. They must a had a turrible time, for they’s all hacked up and bleedin’, and they was the dirtiest little kids ye ever seen.”

“Does any one know where they came from?”

“I dunno. They’re poor folks, I reckon. Their clothes is awful coarse and they live on a farm, I reckon.”

“Well, I must go and look after Ma,” said Madame Ossilena jumping up and beginning to dress. “Doc Kelly says she’s always doin’ too much. Her heart’s awful weak. I wish to goodness she’d take better care of herself, instead of nursing all the ragmuffins that come along.”

While she was grumbling, the deft maid buttoned her high-heeled red shoes and hooked together an elaborately embroidered white gown.

“Don’t stop for all them hooks, Cindy,” she said impatiently, “and give me that scarf for my head. I want Machee to do my hair this morning. Run and tell her I’ve decided to be a brunette to-day, and to bring over a dozen wigs.”

“Be you goin’ to ride this afternoon, Miss Loly,” said Cindy eagerly. “Laws! but don’t I wish I could see you jest once on yer white horse, in that gold and white gown. Jest like a fairy you looks.”

Madame Ossilena laughed. “What a goose you be, Cindy! You know I can’t ride like Dammyloo. You know you like her better than you do me!”

“Oh, Miss Loly! Now you hurts my feelin’s,” said the girl in a grieved tone. “Why, that old

furrin' thing! She's all skin and bones! and she's like a chunk o' lead 'side o' you!'

"Well, I'll see about your goin' to the show. If I don't forget it, I'll ask Bellman to give you a ticket for tomorrow. Now you run and tell Machee to come straight off for my hair. I want to be dressed by eleven o'clock."

She was still smiling when she picked up her white skirts to escape the dusty weeds, and started for her mother's car, but her expression became stern and forbidding in another instant when she met Nick, who had been lying in wait for her.

"What you want?" she said roughly. "But first tell me what you mean by bringing beggars to my mother to take care of. I call that pure impudence, and I tell you what! You'll have to deal with Bellman as soon as I can tell him."

"I just came to speak to you about 'em, Mis' Bellman," said the boy, blinking nervously. "I just heard that the Italian kids that do the Washington stunt has got the measles. Now these two little young ones will do fust rate to fill their places."

"Well, that sounds more like!" said Lola, much mollified. "Hank is awful put out. He didn't

know till last night about the measles, when it was too late to find any one else, and it's dreadful hard to get the right kind of kids anyway. I'll take a look at these young ones to see if they'll do."

As she moved away Nick followed her saying, "I just telephoned to their folks, and they say they'd like to have the children earn some money first rate, and they may stay with the circus a week or two."

"All right," she returned, as she entered her mother's car. "You go and find Hank and tell him I want him, quick."

"How are ye darlin' this mornin'," said her mother, kissing her lovingly. "You had a nawful time with yer poor head last night, didn't ye?"

"Oh, I'm all right now, Ma. Bright as a dollar this morning," said the daughter cheerfully, shaking down her skirts. "But what's this I hear about your turning your car into a hospital? You're up to your old tricks, Ma!"

"Don't you scold, Loly. If you'd a seen these pore little sick and abused kids, you'd a been the first to take 'em in and do for 'em."

"Where are they?" asked her daughter. "Imp

says he's telephoned to their folks, and they're willing to let us keep 'em to do the Washington stunt till our kids gets well."

"My! Ain't that nice!" said Ma Brown beamingly. "Of course they'll do just splendid."

"If they will, Hank'll be tickled to death. I've just sent for him to come here," said the daughter, turning toward the little bed room.

Her mother drew the curtain so that her daughter could see the sleeping children, and while she stood there her husband came in and looked over her shoulder. The situation was explained to him briefly.

"They'll do first rate, won't they Hank?" asked his wife in a whisper.

"Well! I should say so!" answered the big man looking much pleased. "That's a great stroke o' luck. I had no idea what I'd do. It's too late to use 'em today. The parade is makin' up now. But they'll come in play all right at the next stand. You tell Fritz to see about their clothes today, Lola, and tell Maginnis to rehearse 'em this afternoon."

"I'm afraid one o' the little ones won't be well enough for that today," said Ma Brown anxiously.

“Yes, she will, I’ll see to it. Don’t you bother about it, Hank. It’ll be all right,” said his wife reassuringly.

The busy man rushed away to attend to his many duties, and his wife soon followed to see Maginnis and the tailor, and to keep her appointment with her hair dresser.

It was very quiet in the car while Ma Brown dressed for the day, and then pottered about attending to her plants and gold fish, and other small household cares. The circus procession started for its grand parade. The music of the noisy brass bands was much softened by the distance, as they left the grounds, and again, an hour later, when they returned, and still the little girls slept on. But at noon Addy waked and sat up looking rather dazed.

“Here you be with grandma, honey. Don’t be afraid,” said Ma Brown going to the bed. “How do you feel, dearie?” she asked, putting her hand gently on her tousled head.

“Oh, I’m pretty well. How’s Puck?” answered the child eagerly.

“Your little doggie’s doin’ fine. Cindy says he’s eat his breakfast all right and he wagged his

tail when she patted his head. Doc Reeves says he'll be pretty well by tomorrow."

The little girl smiled happily, and putting her arms round the neck of the kind old woman bending over her, she kissed her tanned cheek lovingly.

"Ah! bless her heart!" said Ma Brown, much touched. "I bet you got a lovin' ma to home."

"My own ma is dead," said Addy, "but Aunt Clara's good to us."

"Aunt Clara! She must be the one Henny has been telephonin' to."

"Oh, is she coming for us?" asked Addy eagerly.

"No, she said you was to stay with us a few days, till she sent for you."

"I s'pose she can't leave Benny—he's lame you know," said the child.

"Yes, I guess that's it," assented Ma Brown, "and your bein' here just now comes in very handy for us. We need two little tads like you, and yer aunt told Henny through the telephone that she'd like to have ye make some money."

"How?" said Ab's voice faintly.

"Well, if t'other little tad ain't awake, too! I declare to gracious!" exclaimed Ma Brown as she

peered over Addy to the side of the bed which lay in shadow.

Ab's sharp brown eyes were fixed on her face as she asked again, "How can we earn money?"

"Well, I guess you feel pretty well or you wouldn't be askin' that question. Just wait a minit till I ring for Cindy to bring your dinner and then I'll tell ye."

The black girl came at the summons and started for the dining tent at once, and Ma Brown settled comfortably into a chair by the bed and took Addy's hand as she said, "How would you like to be dressed up like George and Marthy Washington and ride in a little carriage in the parade?"

"I'd like to be George Washington," said Ab promptly.

"I don't think I'd like to have folks looking at me dressed up like that," said Addy hesitatingly.

"Oh, you wouldn't mind after a bit!" said Ma Brown encouragingly. "It's just fun when you're used to it. The Eyetalian kids liked it fine, and my son-in-law will give ye ever so much money for doin' it. More than you could earn pickin' berries by a long shot."

"I'd be glad of that," said Addy. "Uncle Jacob

likes to have us earn money. Perhaps we'd get enough for some new slippers."

"Yes, of course ye would. And Bellman'll give ye a whole bag full to take home with ye!"

Cindy came in now with a big tray, heaped with all sorts of good things to eat, and she and Ma Brown began serving the hungry children a hearty meal.

After that a little old German was called in who took measurements of them both, and in a few moments came back with two ready made blue dresses with brass buttons such as the employees wore. While these were being tried on Lola came in to see how things were going, and decided at once that Addy should personate "Lady Washington," while Ab would be the "General."

"Won't they look too cute, ma, when they're dressed up for the parts," said Lola. "Ever so much better than the Eytalian kids. Hank'll be tickled. He says the Washington stunt is the best thing in the parade. He's been trying the longest time to get the right kind o' children and these just fill the bill."

CHAPTER VI

THE DRILL MASTER

JUST then a short, red haired man stuck his head in through the door and exclaimed in a high voice :

“By the blissed powers of Mulkany! If there ain’t two of ye’s! an wan angel is all poor Maginnis can stand to onct!”

“We don’t want none o’ your blarney, you old Irish coot!” said Lola, laughing. “You come in here now, and attend to business.”

“Bisunus is ut! And phwat may the Queen of the Arena be wantin’ of Maginnis of ould Ireland?”

“Oh, quit yer soft soap! You make me sick,” said Lola. But she smiled as she pushed him into a chair, and went on: “Bellman wants you to rehearse these kids for the Washington stunt. The Eytalians has got the measles.”

“Bedad, and a good job is that same,” said the little man looking admiringly at the girls. “Them

Dagoes was no good. I tould Misther Bellman I cu'dn't do nothing at all wid 'em. But these is made just to order loike. I might a known ye'd do it. Ye just waved yer magic wand like a fairy queen as ye are and, pst! They're here!"

"No," said Lola. "I know I'm awful smart, and I can do almost anything, but you'll have to thank old soft-hearted ma for these kids."

"I didn't find 'em, you know, Loly," protested the mother. "Henny brought 'em. You hadn't ought to overlook the good side of that poor boy, darlin'."

Lola laughed. "Ma'd see somethin' good in the old Harry. But I guess you're right about Imp this time. He's done one good turn for Hank any way."

"How much will you pay us?" asked Ab, looking seriously into the Irishman's face.

"Did ye ever see the loike o' that," Maginnis chuckled. "You Yankees are after money even in yer cradles. But it's all right. 'Money makes the mare go.' Ye can't begin too soon to get it."

"Bellman'll give ye all the money ye want, sis, if ye do the stunt well," said Lola, answering Ab's question.

“And a fine little Ginerall she’ll be makin’,” said Maginnis approvingly. “And the little Lady Washington now,” he continued, turning to Addy. “The baby looks the part foine. But can she do the bowin’ and smilin’, I do’ know?”

“Yes, of course, she can do her part all right,” said Ma Brown encouragingly. “And they both want to earn all they can for their folks.”

“Ah! that’s it, is ut? Well, they’re good children and it’s a foine lot o’ money they’ll be takin’ home wid ’em. Come on me darlin’s and old Maginnis’ll teach ye yer little tricks.”

Ab was still very pale, with dark lines under her eyes, and a large black and blue bump on her forehead. Ma Brown hesitated about letting her leave the car, but she said she felt perfectly well, and begged to be allowed to go. So she consented, and the drill master led them across an open space to a low shed which was almost deserted, for the afternoon performance was going on, and all hands were needed in and around the big tent. The girls could hear the bands playing, and the roar and jingle and banging of a show in full blast. They were much excited and impressed by the fact that they were to be a part of it all very

soon, and Ab said, "Can't we go to the circus when we get through here?"

"Ye'll be afther havin' enough of that same show, me child," said the little man dryly. "Now ye must mind what I tell ye, for we haven't too much time to rehearse ye for the parade tomorrow."

There were a good many vehicles of all sorts in the shed. Maginnis walked right and left among them until he came to a corner where they found a tiny coach with a seat behind for a "tiger." It was old fashioned and looked like pictures the girls had seen of carriages used in Revolutionary times. Maginnis turned back the top to make a landeau, placed the children on the seat and told them how to look and act. Ab was to take off her hat and bow in a dignified way while she sat very straight and stiff, and Addy was taught to smile and bow from right to left to an imaginary audience.

The children were very attentive and soon learned their parts well. The drill master was pleased but looked rather dubious as he said, "Ye do it all right here, but how will it be when yer ridin' through the streets with the whole

town lookin' on, and screechin' and shoutin' at ye's?"

"I can do it all right, I'm sure," said Ab, but Addy shook her head as she said, "I'm afraid I'll be too scared."

"Now look here, little one," said the man kindly. "Don't ye know ye can do just anything ye make up yer mind to do? Ye want to think of the money yer goin' to make fer yer folks. It's mighty little ye got to do anny way. I'd like to make me own livin' that aisy, just bowin' and scrapin' and grinnin' loike."

"Well, I'll try," said Addy faintly.

"What's that for?" asked Ab, pointing to the little seat behind.

"For the footman, to be sure."

"But you can't get one small enough for that, can you?"

"We haven't a live one, sorry's the day."

"Why, you haven't a dead one, have you?" asked Ab in surprise.

Maginnis laughed as he took from a box near by, a small image which looked like a big boy doll. It was dressed in white stockings and knee breeches with a powdered wig and cocked hat on

its head, and its blue coat and buff waistcoat had rows of shining brass buttons.

“We have to make this do till Misther Bellman finds us a trained dog. We had a monkey onct, but ye can’t depind on them animals. They’re too much like men. They haven’t good dog sinse. The jocko we had behaved very well at first, and a fine lot o’ fun the byes had wid him, but phwat did he do one day but snatch the cap off Lady Washington, in the midst of the parade, and jump on the horses’ backs. They reared and kicked and tried to run, and the little Dagoes screeched like mad. It nearly broke up the show.”

“I’ve got a dog,” said Addy eagerly. “He can do all kinds of tricks. Perhaps he’ll do for the footman.”

“But phwat good would he be to us, me child, whin he’s so far away?”

“No, he’s here with us. The doctor took him to the hospital last night, but Cindy says he’s all well now.”

“Ye don’t mean it,” exclaimed Maginnis looking much pleased. “That’s the best luck that’s come my way for many a day, if he’ll be the right size.”

They hurried back to the train, and found Ma Brown feeding Puck from a tin plate. He had been brought over from the hospital in their absence. The little dog seemed well and happy again, and jumped barking into Addy's arms. Maginnis patted his head and Addy said, "Ain't he a nice dog? And he's so smart he'll do anything you tell him."

The Irishman looked Puck over well, and declared that if he had been made for the part, he couldn't suit better. The children went back with Maginnis and the dog to try on the tiny footman's livery, and it was found to be a fit with very little alteration.

Puck was used to being trained, and learned his part quickly when he was drilled, and Addy was very proud and happy when Maginnis left them for other duties, saying he couldn't ask for a better footman, and if he owned that dog, no money could buy him.

CHAPTER VII

JENNIE LIND

IT was now four o'clock. The circus performance was still going on. Its various clanging noises could be heard in the distance, but it was very quiet in Ma Brown's cozy sitting room, where she sat in an old wicker chair near a window knitting peacefully. Her hair was patted down smoothly on her forehead. She wore a clean white apron over her black alpaca dress, and looked very sweet to the sisters, as she smiled when they came in.

"Well, here ye be," she said cheerfully. "How did the little dog answer?"

"Oh, Mr. Maginnis likes him," said Addy in her piping treble voice. "Ain't he a nice little dog, gran—" She hesitated, and then said shyly, "May we call you grandma?"

"Course you may, dearie. That's just what I want you should do," she answered heartily.

Ab began showing off some of Puck's tricks now, and the dog barked excitedly.

"Don't let him make so much noise, honey,"

said Ma Brown. "I'm afraid he'll disturb Jennie Lind. She don't like dogs very well."

"Is she sick?" asked Addy.

"No, she ain't sick, but she's old and cross." And then seeing the children's sympathetic looks she went on apologetically, "But she gets cross 'cause she's nervous. And no wonder. She's had to stay settin' so still in that dark place a long time. But she means well, and she's a nawful good mother."

Ma Brown rose and peeped into a small room through a crack in the door, and said in a low tone, "She's all right, I guess. She's stopped her clack since I giv' her some fresh water a spell ago."

Addy's great grandmother was an old bedridden woman who had lived, ever since she could remember, in a darkened room, demanding and receiving more or less attention from every one about her. It was a very familiar situation to her. She was much interested, and said sympathetically:

"She's your grandma, ain't she? My great grandma had sore eyes too, and had to stay in a dark room."

Ma Brown laid down her knitting and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. "Well, that's the best joke!" she said at last. "I must tell Loly. She'll be tickled to death!"

The children looked mystified, so she stopped laughing and said, "Ye see it seems so funny to me not to have you know about Jennie Lind, I had to laugh. But of course ye haven't had time yet—hev ye?"

She folded up her knitting and rising, beckoned to the girls to follow her. "You must come and see her right away," she said. "Be very still now so as not to disturb her."

She opened a door, and tiptoed into a darkened little room, followed softly by the sisters who peered into the corners, expecting to see a withered crone seated in a chair with a bandage over her eyes. But there was nothing in sight, except an empty chair, a table and a large wire cage hanging from a hook in the ceiling. This was about four times as large as an ordinary canary bird's cage, and had a green cloth over it. Ma Brown lifted a corner of this, and motioned the girls to come nearer.

“Why! She’s an old hen!” whispered Addy in astonishment.

“Of course she is! And ain’t she a nice old biddy! She’s clear Plymouth Rock. Ye can depend on that breed. She’s been settin’ on them eggs, there’s fourteen of ’em, for two weeks and five days. I can’t hardly make her leave ’em to take a little exercise. But she’ll have her little chicks out now in about a week or so, and then she’ll feel better.”

The sight of an old setting hen went straight to Addy’s heart. She put her arm round Ma Brown’s waist and whispered, “Can’t I pat her a little, grandma?”

“I guess not, honey. She’d be apt to snap at ye.”

The old hen turned a red hostile eye on the child, and made a hoarse croaking sound in her throat. Addy knew exactly what that meant. If she had said in words, “hands off,” she couldn’t have understood her language better. She giggled as she snuggled to the old woman’s side, saying softly, “Ain’t she nice, grandma?”

Ma Brown was very much pleased, and hugged

the little girl to her fat bosom before leading the way back to her chair. As she picked up her knitting, Addy said:

“How long have you had Jennie Lind, grandma?”

“I raised her. She’s four years old now. She’s an awful lot o’ company when Loly’s busy. I’d be dreadful lonesome without her sometimes.”

“Don’t you like to be with the circus?” asked Addy.

“No, honey. It’s a hard life and ’tain’t home no way ye can fix it. But I try to make the best of it. It’s the only way I can have my girl with me.”

“Where is your home?” asked Addy, picking up her ball of yarn and slowly unwinding it, while Ma Brown’s needles clicked steadily.

“Way out in Ioway, dearie, where Loly was born and raised.”

The children looked interested, evidently expecting to hear more, and Ma Brown went on: “Loly got married when she was seventeen, and she’s ben ridin’ in the circus for three years. When her pa died she wouldn’t hear . . . layin’ on the

farm alone. She couldn't leave her husband, and so there wa'n't nothin' for me to do but come along with 'em. Hank, he's the best son-in-law that ever was. He can't do enough for me, and so I hadn't ought to complain."

Ma Brown looked sharply at her knitting, picked up a dropped stitch, and then, glancing at the clock, said, as she rose, "Well, I declare! I didn't know it was gittin' so late. Loly'll be here direc'ly. She's been doin' her stunt today, and she'll be all tired out and het up. I must make some lemonade for her."

The sisters begged to help and she allowed them to rummage her tiny kitchen and bring together to the small table in the sitting room the various articles needed. They felt very much at home as they cracked the ice and squeezed the lemons, and while they were all busy, Ma Brown went on: "I s'pose you think it's queer for me to have an old hen for a pet when I'm travelin' round. Well, it was just this way. Hank was so anxious to have me come, and wanted me to feel so contented and to home, that he said I might have anything I wanted. He wouldn't a said a word if I'd a brought an old cow and calf along."

She shook with laughter as she went on, "Course I wa'n't a goin' to impose on Hank, so I just took Jennie Lind and old Tom," pointing to a big yellow cat lying asleep on the lounge.

"Did you bring your furniture, too?" asked Addy, glancing at the rag carpet on the floor.

"Just a few things. This carpet I wove myself, and I used to rock Loly to sleep in that chair, when she was a baby. You see that big chest over there? Well, that's full of little notions and keepsakes I've been gettin' together all my life. I brought along my feather bed and some patch work quilts. I feel more to home with these things around me, and then Hank wanted me to bring along the name o' our little house to home. So he had it painted on my car."

The girls ran out and read the words "Brown Sugar" in gilt letters on the dark green surface.

"Ye see Loly's pa was a great hand to joke," said Ma Brown, laughing, when the children came back to her. "He used to say 'home sweet home, was what our place was, all right, and there wa'n't nothin' sweeter than sugar, so as long's we were Browns, our place was naturally Brown Sugar';

and he told it so many times, the neighbors got to callin' it that, and finally pa had the name painted on the gate."

The little room looked as though it had been moved bodily from some far away country home. On the walls were several crayon portraits together with a "hair wreath," all of them framed in black walnut, and under an old fashioned clock hung an almanac and a pasteboard box containing a brush and comb.

The rag carpet, the braided rugs, the worn rocking chair with its patch work cushion, the cherry wood stand, with glass knobs on its two drawers, the old lounge and footstools, all harmonized with the rest, and together with Ma Brown's placid appearance, gave the place a very homelike and restful air.

The only thing not in keeping was a large gilded cage hanging from the ceiling, and holding a gorgeous parrot.

"Did you bring him, too?" asked Ab, as the bird began to talk harshly.

"Good land, no, honey. He ain't none of my choosin'. Hank giv' him to me for my last birth-

day. He knows I like pets, and he thought Scroggins would please me, and I don't let on to him or Loly."

"Why, I think he's awful pretty," said Addy, walking over to the cage. "And he's cute, too."

The girls laughed as the handsome parrot hopped toward them on his perch, and cocked his head on one side as he wished them "Good morning."

"Yes, he's good lookin', and he's smart," said Ma Brown. "But 'handsome is as handsome does,' is a good rule. He ain't my kind of a pet. He hain't got no heart. He'd just as leave bite me as not. He looks like a wicked old man, and I git so nervous with his everlastin' cacklin' and croakin', I keep his cage covered up with a cloth, most o' the time. But he's got one good friend. Cindy likes him. If she wa'n't so busy I'd call her to hang him outside. He likes to be in the sun and talk to the dogs."

"Let us carry him out," said Addy quickly.

"Do ye think ye can do it? Ye may try if ye want to. Take out that old chair to stand on, and be sure not to let him fall. He'd scold ye good if ye did."

While the children were struggling to hang the big cage on a hook fastened to the side of the car, a slender figure came behind them so silently that they did not know she was there until she spoke.

She was wrapped from head to foot in some light gray silk drapery and the children caught only a glimpse of her dark eyes, as she placed her hand for an instant on Addy's head, and said something in a sweet voice that they could not understand. She seemed to fly away then and they ran in to ask about her.

"It must be the French bareback rider," said Ma Brown. "Her name's Dammyloo. She gets the biggest salary of any of the performers. Hers is the last car. It's got a gilt star on it. She goes past here every day, but I never git a good look at her she's so covered up, and goes so fast."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPOILED CHILD

THE pitcher of lemonade was placed in the icebox to keep cold until Lola should come in, and while they were waiting for her, Ab asked, "Is Mr. Bellman a circus rider, too?"

"Land, no! What an idea," said Ma Brown, glancing up from her knitting. "He's one of the business managers. He hires all the performers, the teamsters, the working gangs, and all them folks, and sees that everything keeps goin'. He gits an awful big salary, and he owns a part of the show. He's rich enough to quit work any time, and he'd like to leave the circus and do business in the city, but Loly teases to stay. She's crazy about ridin', and she wants to be with the show till she gits her name way up."

"Doesn't Mr. Bellman like to have her ride?" asked Ab.

"Well, ye see Hank lets her do whatever she wants to. Her pa always sp'iled her, and her hus-

band is just as bad. But Loly's got a good heart. I guess she ain't sp'iled very deep. But if you begin to talk of angels they always come round, and here's one sure enough."

She smiled as her daughter came in, but her expression changed at once to one of anxiety when she saw the clouded face.

"What is it, my pet!" she said tenderly. "What's went wrong?"

"Oh, don't bother me, Ma," said Lola crossly. "You always think something's happened if I'm not grinning. I'm just hot and tired."

"Here, let Ma give ye some lemonade. I made it a purpose for ye."

The young woman took the glass ungraciously from her mother's hand, swallowed the delicious drink, and then said in the same unamiable tone, "Where's Cindy? That lazy darkey's never round when she's wanted."

"Why, you know you set her to cleanin' your white shoes. You've got a lot of 'em and it takes a long time."

"Oh, nonsense, Ma. You're always standin' up for Cindy and takin' sides against me!"

"Somethin' *has* happened to ye honey," said

the mother anxiously, "or you wouldn't be so snappy to yer pore old Ma."

"Nothin's happened except I fell off my horse, but you don't care if I did," said the spoiled child, beginning to cry.

"Oh, my pore baby! Did it hurt ye?" cried the mother trying to put her arms round Lola's neck.

"Oh, git away, Ma!" said the daughter, pushing her off. "You know I hate to be hugged in hot weather. I ain't hurt, but if you think it's any fun for me to fall off my horse with that nasty Damyloo lookin' on, you don't know me."

"Don't fret about it so, honey! Every one falls off sometimes, I don't believe any one thought any thing about it."

Lola flounced from one chair to another and began fanning herself vigorously.

"You bet Damyloo never falls off," she said fretfully. "I could ride as good as she does if I'd had her trainin'. I don't know what you and pa was thinkin' of to neglect me so."

"Now, daughter, that's too bad for you to speak so about your poor dead pa," said her mother in a grieved tone. "You know he'd a cut his hand

off if you'd a wanted it, and he did everything he knew how to make ye happy. Ye jest lived with the horses, ye loved 'em so much, and—."

"Yes, I know," interrupted Lola. "He let me ride the colts and stand on my head on the ponies' backs, but that ain't no trainin'."

"There's Jennie Lind! She's off her nest!" said Ma Brown as a fluttering cackling sound was heard in the next room. "I must let her out for a spell so she can stretch her legs and git some fresh air."

"Yes, of course! You care more for that everlastin' old hen than you do for your own child." Lola picked up her parasol and bounced away, leaving her mother looking sorrowfully after her.

"Pore child," she said apologetically. "She feels dretful about that fall. It's awful mortifying. She's a nawful good rider, but she can't seem to stick on when she gets excited. I s'pose she got a sight of Damyloo and that upset her."

The children were sober and silent, so Ma Brown went on, "Ye mustn't think Loly talks that way to her ma very often. She thinks the world and all o' me. She'll be sorry she was so cross, and she'll come and tell me so before long."

The children were to sleep on little cots in Ma Brown's sitting room. Cindy brought them supper and after their exciting experiences they were quite ready for bed before dark.

Ma Brown put fresh bandages and lotions on their cuts and bruises, and tucked them in their little white beds with a good night kiss.

"Will we be here tomorrow, grandma?" asked Addy.

"No, darlin', we'll be hauled off to the next place, after the show is over tonight. There ain't no abidin' place for circus folks, you know. I used to be awful interested in the new places we come to, but now they're all alike to me, and I don't even know the name of this town we're in."

"Will Aunt Clara write to us, and tell us how long we're to stay with the circus?" asked Ab.

"I 'spect so, honey. Henny's tendin' to that. He'll come and see ye tomorrow, and like as not he'll bring ye a letter. You better go to sleep now so you'll be all rested up for the parade tomorrow. You look pretty peaked and pale yet, and I guess you need a lot o' sleep. It was dretful for you to git lost that way, wa'n't it, but I'm awful glad you turned up here."

“I think it’s fun,” said Ab. “And I’m glad we can earn some money, but I wish we could have a letter from Aunt Clara.”

“We’ll send her a telegram tomorrow so she’ll know how you be, and she’ll write to ye I’m sure and you’ll git the letter pretty soon.”

This was enough to satisfy Ab’s uneasy feeling that she and Addy ought to know more about their movements. Addy herself always took everything on trust, and felt very happy and safe under Ma Brown’s protecting wing, her only speculation as she closed her eyes, being, “why was it that the boy who brought them there, whose name was Nick, should be called “Imp” and “Henny.” But this did not trouble her long, and with Puck on a rug by their side the children were soon sound asleep and never knew when the big tent with all the smaller ones was folded and stowed away in baggage cars; the hundreds of men, women and children, with all sorts of belongings, and the innumerable horses and wild beasts were in theirs, and the long trains moved on to the next stopping place, twenty miles away.

Ma Brown was sleeping in her chair, almost too tired to rise and undress for bed, when she was

wakened by a kiss on her cheek, and Lola was saying, "Ma, I was just dirt mean to you today, and I'm awful sorry. Now you go to bed right away. You're tired to death. I'll unbutton your shoes."

CHAPTER IX

THE PARADE

THE dining tent was a noisy place when Ma Brown entered it the next morning with the sisters. Every one seemed to know her, and many called after her as she passed them on her way between two long tables.

“Hullo! Ma Brown! How’s Jennie Lind this morning?” asked a tall young man with eye-glasses. “She ain’t off yet is she?”

“No, she’s still a settin’,” said Ma Brown smiling, as she took her seat on a bench by the side of the young man. “Can’t ye shove along, Sammy, for these little girls,” she added.

“Sure,” said Sammy heartily. “Move up there, and give us room for Ma Brown’s orphan asylum.”

“Don’t you be makin’ fun of these chicks, honey. They’re circus folks now. Bellman’s hired ’em to do the Washington stunt till the Eyetalians gets well.”

“The father and mother of our country must

be treated with due respect," said Sammy in a solemn tone, and then squeezing Addy into a crack by his side, he added in a cheerful breezy voice, "Have some ham and eggs, Lady Washington. I suppose this towheaded baby's Martha, ain't she, Ma Brown?"

He was so friendly and kind, and so full of fun, that Addy liked him, and began her breakfast feeling quite at home.

Every one about them seemed in a great hurry and was eating fast, paying little attention to others, and the waiters were running about serving coffee and hot rolls very rapidly. There were a great many people of all sorts at the tables, young, middle aged and old, men, women and children, and most of them were clean and presentable, though here and there was a carelessly dressed person in shirt sleeves or a wrapper.

Ma Brown explained to the children that there was a dining tent for the employees, and another big tent for "the hands," the teamsters and cooks and all who did rough work.

"Do Mr. and Mrs. Bellman eat here?" asked Ab.

"No, dearie, they have a dinin' room of their

own, and a French cook. Loly feels awful bad because I don't eat with them. But I like to see the folks here. It seems sociable like, and Hank wants I should do what I please, so I come to this tent for most of my meals."

Just then a freckled-faced girl with a towel over her shoulders and her freshly washed hair standing out in all directions, stopped an instant to pat Ab's head and say, "Your kids is real cute, Ma Brown," and then rushed away with many others to a large tent near by.

"Who is she, grandma?" asked Ab.

"Her name's Nannie Kirk. She's a singer, and she does stunts with her brother in the concert every night after the show. She's a right nice girl."

Almost every one had left the tables now, and Addy asked, "Why do they all hurry so, grandma?"

"They've got to dress for the parade, honey. Maginnis makes 'em get ready by half past nine so he can go round to see if they're all right before they start at ten. We'd better hurry, too," she went on, finishing her coffee and rising, "We mustn't keep the make-up men waiting."

The girls didn't know what she meant, but they followed her to the dressing tent, where they found a good many people sitting in chairs before a row of mirrors fastened on a long table. They were powdering their faces, and putting on wigs and whiskers and mustaches. Presently a thin lipped man with a pale face came along with a dark stick in his hand. With the point of this he blacked eyebrows and eyelashes, and with another stick, which he also carried in his pocket, he touched lips and cheek bones with rouge.

"These the Washington kids?" he asked briefly.

Ma Brown nodded. He looked them over carefully a moment, smeared his stuff on their eyebrows and lips, and told her to use a great deal of powder to hide tan and freckles. Then showing her how to cover Ab's bumped forehead with a wig, he hurried on. She followed his orders, and then took the children to a small alcove where a woman dressed them in the continental costumes the tailor had provided.

"They're a nawful cute little couple," said the woman giving a final pat and twitch to Addy's mob cap. "Just take 'em out please, ma'am. Ma-

dame Ossilena'll be here in a minute, and I got to have plenty o' room to dress her in."

As Ma Brown led the girls away she said, "That's Loly's circus name you know. Now you'll see her lookin' handsome. She's goin' to be 'Liberty Enlightenin' the World.' Hank likes to have her do that stunt. She looks just grand. When I see her way up so high, holdin' that big torch, I can't hardly realize she's my baby."

They were now in a corner of the dressing tent, and in a moment she said, "Ah, there's Maginnis. Now stand up and let him look ye over. He'll be in a nawful hurry and like as not he'll be cross, but don't ye mind that. He's got a lot to bother him."

The little Irishman looked at them critically. He had none of the joking easy air of the day before, and said warningly to Addy, "Now ye mind what I tould ye. Ye don't want that scared look on yer face. Ye must be on the grin every minute! Ye understand?"

Addy said nothing, but she looked as though she would cry, and Ma Brown hastened to say, "Now look here Maginnis, you don't want to make

Lady Washington bow and scrape and grin. That ain't the way American ladies does. You better let this little tad just set still and look cute, and the General do all the bowin' and smirkin'."

The Irishman scratched his head and said, "Well, ma'am, I think ye're right, as ye always are. Do what she tells ye," he said with a nod to Addy and hurried away.

Addy was so much relieved that she was almost cheerful. She had sometimes played "visiting," with a little cousin, when she had dressed in her aunt's clothes, so it seemed a familiar experience to personate a little woman, although she and Ab were so powdered and rouged and wigged and furbelowed, that they hardly seemed human, and looked very much like handsome dolls as they were placed in the little coach, which was drawn by four small white ponies with silver mounted harness, and Puck sat in footman's livery in the little seat behind. A midget from the side show, with a large head and small body, was the coachman.

Ab was much excited and pleased, and Addy lost a good deal of her shyness and dread in watching the parade form about them. There

was no confusion and very little noise as the animals and wagons moved rapidly to their places in the line. Men came running from all directions to mount to the drivers' seats, many of them pulling on red coats and caps after they had taken their places. The elephants, the camels and the clowns passed so close to the children that they could almost touch them with their hands.

Nannie Kirk, dressed gorgeously as the "Queen of Sheba," looked down on them with a smile as she rode by on a loose jointed camel, and they could hear scraps of conversation as white gowned women rushed past to stand with gilt crowns and red and blue sashes on a big "float" and represent the United States.

It seemed like a dream to look before them and see the huge gilded band wagons, the steam piano with its great pipes, the cages of wild animals, the mounted Arabs and wild Indians, with dozens of other dazzling objects stretching almost out of sight, and realize that they were a part of it all.

When everything was ready Lola walked slowly down the line, and with the help of her husband and two other men, mounted a ladder and stood on a pedestal perhaps ten feet high. This was moved

by wheels concealed by drapery, and was drawn by two large black horses. She made a very imposing and conspicuous figure with her large white arm holding aloft the big torch, and her tall handsome form covered with drapery. The children were almost startled by her resemblance to pictures of the famous statue in New York Harbor, with which they were familiar, and thought Ma Brown quite right in saying she looked "just grand."

At last a bugle sounded. The first band began to play, and the long glittering procession passed slowly down the street.

The sisters had so many times stood on the sidewalk to see the circus go by, that they knew perfectly with what breathless interest the children lining the street were watching them. Ab began bowing gravely and lifting her hat at intervals, and Addy soon found that "Lady Washington" was not the only one to be looked at in the parade. Much to her delight, Puck received a great deal of applause. She could hear people saying, "Do see that little dog. Isn't he too cute?" and as every one smiled on Addy, and called her "sweet" in her little white wig and

quaint gown, she felt as though she was among friends and was quite happy when the procession returned to the grounds, after winding through a number of long streets.

Ma Brown was at the carriage door when they stopped, looking very much pleased. "Ye done lovely," she said, kissing them. "Bellman is awful glad, and I've got somethin' for ye to home."

She waited until the "property woman" took off their costumes and they were dressed in their pretty little gowns, and then hurrying to her own quarters she handed each one a small bag containing three dollars in nickels.

"Ain't it nice," said Ma Brown, "to get your pay as soon's you've earnt it."

CHAPTER X

JENNIE LIND "COMES OFF"

NEXT morning rather early, Nick came as usual to "Brown Sugar," to see if Ma Brown had any errands for him to do. He found her with Cindy and Ab and Addy, outside the car on the ground—all of them very much excited, for Jennie Lind had hatched her eggs in the night and had been brought out in her cage with her brood to enjoy the bright morning air. She was tied to a wheel of the car by one of her yellow legs, and was walking about and clucking in a very fussy way; and her family of ten downy chicks were running after her clucking hungrily. Ma Brown had boiled an egg for Jennie Lind's breakfast which she was preparing for her, and Addy was feeding the chicks their first meal of bread soaked in milk, while Ab and Cindy gathered fresh grass for the bottom of the cage.

"How are ye, Henny?" said Ma Brown kindly, noticing the boy at last as he leaned against the car watching them. "We're all so busy with Jen-

nie Lind's hatchin' this mornin' we can't see our friends. I ain't got nothin' for you to do today but yer socks is all darned nice fur ye. Cindy, you run in and git Henny's socks. They're in my darnin' basket."

Cindy obeyed the order unwillingly, looking cross and muttering as she threw the stockings at Nick, who picked them up with a grin and walked away.

"There now, you've hurt his feelin's," said Ma Brown. "What you so ugly to poor Henny for, Cindy? He hain't done ye no harm."

"I ain't got no use fur him, Mis' Brown," said Cindy tossing her woolly head. "An' I don't see why you calls him Henny. Imp's what the boys has named him, and that's what he is."

"Pore boy," said Ma Brown sitting down on a chair which Addy brought her. "There ain't a soul in the world cares fur him. He never had no home, and nobody to teach him to be good. He's just had kicks and cuffs all his days."

Addy looked up much interested and said, "Ain't Henny his real name, grandma?"

"No, honey. I don't know his real name, and I guess he don't hear it very often. The boys

began to call him 'Imp' when he first came, and a nickname sticks like tar. But I couldn't bear to hear him called that. He looks a little like a brother I lost when I was young. His name was Henry—Henny for short, so I named this boy Henny for him, and I told him he must be a good boy like my little brother."

"He was good to bring us to you, grandma," said Addy.

"Bless her heart," said Ma Brown patting the child's head. "I'm glad some one besides me can see some good in poor Henny. I always said he wa'n't all bad."

The news spread that Jennie Lind had hatched, and Ma Brown had many visitors in consequence, that day. Lola was the first one. She sat on the grass and took half a dozen of the soft little creatures in her lap.

"Ain't they nice, Ma," she said holding a chick close to her cheek. "I declare it almost makes me homesick for the farm."

"Does it darlin'," said her mother eagerly. "Well, so it does me. I've been wonderin' if the other hens there have been doin' any better than Jennie Lind. I don't believe any of 'em has

hatched out so many of the settin'. She always was the best one in the hull batch for that. If she'd been to home, like as not she'd a come off with all of 'em."

While Lola was still sitting on the ground, half a dozen girls in curl papers and wrappers came running up to admire the chicks, and even the busy young doctor stopped a moment as he passed to offer his congratulations.

"What you going to do with 'em when they grow up?" he asked laughing. "You can't carry round a menagerie of hens. You'll have to give 'em away when they're big enough for broilers, won't you?"

"No, indeed," said Ma Brown, emphatically. "Nobody'll ever eat my chicks. They're all goin' to be sent by express to the farm in Ioway, where they'll have a good time and die of old age. But I mean to keep 'em as long's I can, and that'll be when Jennie Lind stops broodin' 'em. I 'spose it won't be good for 'em to be cooped up after that."

"I see you've still got the sick kids," remarked the doctor, noticing the children near the cage. "I thought you told me they were country kids that

were lost on the mountain. You haven't turned kidnapper, have you, Ma Brown?"

She laughed and said, "I'd like to keep 'em first rate. They're awful nice little creatures, but I s'pose we can't do that. But we're goin' to keep 'em two weeks till the Eytalians gets over the measles."

"That is good luck for Bellman," said the doctor starting to move away. "How'd you happen to find 'em?"

Ma Brown walked by his side as she answered: "Why, you see, Hank sent a man out into the country to buy horses of the farmers. You know big Tom, don't ye? Well, he took with him that handy boy that does errands, his name's Nick."

"Yes, I know him," said the doctor, stopping short and looking much interested.

"Well," said Ma Brown going on with her story, "they got caught in a storm on the mountain, and had to stay all night, and early in the mornin' they came across these little girls. They'd been lost and didn't know where they was; and one of 'em was so bad off the boys thought she needed a doctor right quick, so they brought them to me."

"But how did you get word to their folks so that you knew they were willing to have you bring them along with us?"

"Why, Nick telephoned to the Aunt and made the bargain," replied Ma Brown.

"You didn't take his word for it—I hope," said the doctor looking sharply at her.

"Sure I did! Why not!" exclaimed Ma Brown.

"Because he's a young scalawag, and the word of truth's not in him. He's up to some mischief. I've had dealings with him. I know what I'm talking about," said the doctor.

"Now, Teddy, you ain't fair to that pore boy," said Ma Brown anxiously, with her hand on the doctor's arm. "He likes me, and I know he wouldn't cheat me nohow."

"Well, you'd better look into the matter yourself," returned the doctor. "I wouldn't trust that young scamp an inch from my nose, and you'd better look out or he'll get you into trouble."

He started once more to leave her, but she held him a moment to say hurriedly: "Well, I will, Teddy. I'll telegraph to their folks right off—I was goin' to any way. But I want you should

promise not to say anythin' about it to anybody till I hear from 'em—you will, won't ye?"

"Course, I'll promise you anything. Mum's the word," he answered smiling, as he at last walked briskly away, leaving her to join the children looking very sad and anxious.

She sat down in the chair and took her knitting from her pocket. She could think better when her needles were clicking. Doctor Kelly had put a suspicion in her mind, and for the first time she began to think that perhaps Nick had been lying to her, and that the uncle and aunt of the little girls really knew nothing of their whereabouts. That was a thought that made her tremble, and grow hot and cold by turns. Her first impulse was to go to Mr. Bellman for counsel, but she hesitated, for she feared that he would be too severe with Nick, and perhaps too hasty in his judgments. She did not wish to alarm Ab and Addy, and besides she was not sure the doctor's suspicions were correct. She could not imagine Nick's motive for deceiving her, and yet when she really thought about it there was something very improbable in his statement that he had telephoned to the uncle and aunt. They lived on a farm far

from the railroad and probably had no telephone. She began cautiously to question the little girls to make sure of her ground before she made a move.

"What you goin' to do with all the money ye make here?" she asked Ab who was busy unwinding a tangle of strings she had picked up on her way home from the parade.

"Keep it till we get home, I guess," returned Ab.

"Ye'll have quite a pile won't ye, if ye save six dollars a day."

"We can't save it all," said Ab, still pulling on her string. "We have to give Nick one third of it for bringin' us here."

Ma Brown's heart sank. Now she knew the doctor was right—Nick had deceived her. He was keeping the children without letting their friends know where they were, for the sake of making money from them. It amounted to kidnapping, and the consequences might be dreadful to them all. She believed that Nick was too ignorant and inexperienced to realize what he had done, and she was sure he would have some explanation of his action that would make it seem less wicked—

to her at least. If she gave him up to the proper authorities at once, there would be no help for him. He would be sent to a penitentiary, and that would end all hope for his future. She believed he had a kind heart and an affectionate nature, and that the right sort of influences about him might yet reform and perhaps make him into a good man. She had no idea of shielding him from punishment. She knew he deserved that, but she meant to see that he received justice if possible. She had heard of a humane judge somewhere, who gave his life toward helping just such boys as Nick to lead a better life. She made up her mind that she would wait and find out more about him—perhaps he would help her to save this poor homeless waif. But she must act at once. She rolled up her knitting work and put it in her bag as she said to Addy, who was playing on the steps of the car, “Don’t you want to get grandma her umbrella, honey? I’m going to the office to do an errand, and I’d like to leave you two to keep house while I’m gone. You’ll take good care o’ Jennie Lind, won’t ye? and don’t let no stray dogs bother her.”

She had talked with the children the night be-

fore, and knew their history. She remembered their aunt's name and address, and had decided to send her a telegram, and afterward write her a letter, and wait for a reply before taking any further step.

"I want to send a telegram right quick, Bandy," she said to the clerk in Mr. Bellman's office. "You'll take it down for me—won't you?"

"Sure, I'll be glad to, Mrs. Brown," said the young man, rising and offering her a chair; and picking up his pencil, waited for her to dictate. She had decided on her message, and after giving the address, she added: "Girls all right. Letter today. S. Brown."

"Now you'll send it off to once, Bandy," she said rising.

"Course, Mrs. Brown," replied the clerk heartily. "I'll go straight off this minute to see myself that it goes all right. It'll be there before ye can say Jack Robinson."

Ma Brown smiled and patted his arm. "Yer an awful good boy, Bandy," she said; "and I'm awfully much obliged to ye." He helped her down the steps of the car and she trudged home as fast as she could. By this time she had another plan,

and calling the little girls to her she said: "Come with grandma to have our pictures took together. Don't you think that will be nice?"

They were delighted with the proposal, and leaving Jennie Lind in Cindy's care the three were soon on their way to the photographer's car.

"We want to be took together on a post card," said Ma Brown to the photographer. "Can you finish 'em up quick for us?"

"Have 'em in an hour, Mis' Brown," returned the man briskly.

"Well, we couldn't ask nothin' better'n that," she said as she sat down in the chair before the camera. The girls stood—one on each side of her. Addy put her arm round her neck and Ab held her hand. They were all smiling, when the photographer, choosing a favorable moment, pressed the bulb in his hand, and threw a cloth over the camera.

"Why, we ain't took yet, be we?" said Ma Brown. "I was jist gettin' ready to put on my company face. I'm afraid ye took me grinnin'."

"It's all right, Mis' Brown," said the man. "Ye looked fine, and I'll have the cards ready in no time."

He hurried into his little dark room, and as Ma Brown was anxious to write her letter, she left the children to wait for the photographs while she went back to her car.

She could read and write, but her spelling was rather uncertain and it was a slow task to write a letter. When one had to be written her daughter or son-in-law usually wrote it for her. But this one she must manage alone as best she could. Fortunately she had a small dictionary which would help her with the difficulties of spelling, so placing her writing materials on the table in a good light and telling Cindy not to let any one disturb her, she began her task. She spoiled a good many sheets of paper at the start but finally she made a beginning that she thought would do, and with the faithful dictionary to tell her how to spell more of the puzzling words, and throwing in capitals when she thought of them, she finished her letter just as the children came back with the post cards.

It was written in a childish cramped hand, but plainly enough, and read:

"DERE MIS CARTER,—i jest telegrafed your little girls is all rite. our men found 'em on

the mountain, they was hit by litnin, and we took care of 'em. I just found out ye dont kno where they be. I thot you did, so we had em do a stunt in the parade. we are circus folks. we want to keep em two weeks but if you say so we will take em home rite away. if you will let em stay I will kep em with me and take good care of em and they will be well paid for the stunt. Direct to our office in new york. The adres is on the card I send with this, and i will get it. so no more. S. BROWN."

The photographs proved to be very good, and the girls were anxious to send them to their aunt and other friends. Ma Brown expected to put one of them in her letter, but thought it would be a good idea for the girls to send some messages of their own. She gave them pen and ink, and each one scribbled a few words on a postal. They had been to a good school in the village where they had always lived until their mother's death, and had learned to spell and write very well for youngsters of their age—or at least Ab had. Her handwriting was clear and round, almost like print. She wrote: "Dear Aunt Clara we get six dollars,

a day riding in the circus parade dressed up like George and Martha Washington. How is Benny. Ab."

Addy wrote in rather a straggling shaky hand, and she was never quite sure of her spelling and capitals. Her message was rather short as there was only room on the postal for a few words. They read: "Dere aunt Clara Grandma Brown is good to us. I love her. Addy."

Stamps were ready to put on the letter and post cards. Cindy was sent with the girls to the post-office to mail them, and Ma Brown sat in her rocking chair to rest and think what she would do with Nick.

CHAPTER XI

AUNT CLARA

ON the day Ab and Addy were lost in the woods their aunt had no anxiety about them, until the terrific storm came in the afternoon with its unusually destructive wind and its torrents of rain. She then began to wonder if they had reached their destination safely, and to feel vaguely uneasy about them. Her husband laughed at her fears.

“You do beat the Dutch for worryin’ about nothin’,” he said. “Why, you couldn’t lose ’em if you tried.”

“But that dreadful storm, Jake!” protested his wife. “I’m awful afraid they got caught in it.”

“Well, what if they did? ’Twouldn’t hurt ’em a mite. Besides they must have seen it coming in plenty of time to get under shelter, you needn’t be a bit afraid that Ab couldn’t take care of herself and Addy too.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s so,” returned his wife,

somewhat relieved. "Ab is unusually old for her years. We can depend on her good judgment to do the right thing if they got into trouble, but I wish we could hear from them," she added, looking through the window at the bricks from the chimneys, the branches of trees and overturned chicken coops which the wind had scattered about the yard. "That lightning was terrible and poor Addy is so afraid in a thunder storm," she continued.

"Now, don't you worry, mother. Just as likely as not Mis' Higgins was feedin' her pie in the kitchen when the worst of it came."

"Yes," she said hopefully. "They probably hurried and got there before the storm broke. They had plenty of time to do that. It's only four miles you know."

"Course they did," said her husband confidently, "and then we'll hear from 'em just as soon's a letter can get here. Higgins will know we'll be worryin', and he won't lose any time in writin'."

She knew this was a reasonable expectation and so tried to put her worry out of her mind, as she busied herself with her many cares.

The chief of these was her little crippled son who had not walked for two years, and lay patient and motionless on his bed encased in a plaster cast which was expected in time to straighten his poor crooked spine. He needed and received constant attention from his mother, who by dint of always hurrying, and never stopping to rest, managed to do the work of the household, besides nursing and amusing the little invalid.

She was so tired that night that she slept soundly, while her husband took charge of the child, but when she wakened in the morning her fears for the safety of her nieces all came back to her with new force, and she began to blame herself for letting them start off alone on such a long journey.

“Oh, shucks! Do be reasonable, Clara,” urged her husband. “You know they’ve been as far as that alone, time and again, nuttin’ and fishin’. They’re all right. ‘No news is good news.’ If anything had happened to ’em you’d a heard of it before now.”

He went to his work in the fields, and the day passed for her as days usually did, crowded full

of work which must be done, cooking, cleaning, churning, caring for the baby, and nursing the sick. She heard several times through the day from neighbors of the havoc the storm had made the day before through the countryside, and in the village two miles away several roofs had been blown off from houses, many chimneys had fallen to the ground, cattle were injured and one young man was stunned by a blow from a flying fence rail. Every one said there had never been such a tempest before in that region. "Pretty nigh like the blizzards they git out west, I guess," said one old farmer.

Aunt Clara's mind was filled again with foreboding and she was not surprised when late in the afternoon Mr. Carter came hurriedly to the house, looking pale and sober. A neighbor had just come to tell him that some one had found a girl's jacket in the woods which was thought to belong to Ab.

"Now let's be cool and clear headed about this," he said to his wife who sat in a chair, speechless and trembling. "Don't be so scared, mother. It's no sign that anything's happened to 'em even if

that is Ab's jacket. You know how careless young ones are. Like as not she laid it down and forgot it when she went on."

Mrs. Carter tried very hard to be calm and to think clearly.

"Hush," she said in a low tone. "I don't want Benny to hear anything about it."

He closed the door of the sick room, and just then two men came in, bringing with them both jackets and hats of the missing children. They had been found in different places in the woods, and now there was no doubt in the mind of any one that something serious had happened. News of that kind travels fast. By nightfall the little house of the Carters was filled with excited men and boys, together with women who had come to help and comfort as much as possible.

The first thing to do, of course, was to find if the girls had arrived at Mr. Higgins' house. The nearest telephone was a mile and a half away. One of the men who had brought the jackets agreed to ride on his swift horse to the village to telephone to the postmaster of the village near which Mr. Higgins lived, asking him to get for them the desired information as soon as possible.

Mr. Higgins happened to be in the post-office at the time the message was received, and of course was able to answer at once, that the children had neither been seen or heard from.

And now there was a great deal of discussion as to what was best to be done. There were different theories in regard to the matter. A few people thought the children had been kidnapped and that a detective should be employed to take charge of the case, but almost every one believed that they had lost their way and were wandering about the woods, perhaps sick or disabled, and that no time should be lost in the search for them.

As soon as possible, parties were organized to begin and systematically carry on the search, with lanterns and horns. Every one was confident that by morning the children would be found, for fifty men and boys, to say nothing of dogs, began beating every inch of ground of the big pine forest.

But in the morning, when the space had been faithfully explored more than once, they were obliged to give up this hope, and the kidnapped theory was now the general one adopted and discussed at breakfast tables by the weary men and anxious women.

The sheriff of the county had led the search and was the one who now proposed to Mr. and Mrs. Carter, that the matter be put in the hands of an experienced detective. While they were arranging to carry out this advice, every one was thrown into the wildest excitement by the arrival of a letter. It had the post mark of a large town, not many miles away and the date was the day after the storm. The words on the greasy sheet of paper were few and badly written and very puzzling. They read:

“‘kids struck by litnin’. takin ’em to Miss’ brown, tak ’em home when tha gits wel.”

There was no signature and no clue whatever to the writer. He was evidently a very ignorant person, but no one doubted that he was kind and honest, and had probably done the best he could by taking the injured children to the nearest house for help.

Nick’s thoughtful act brought more relief and happiness than he ever dreamed of, when he posted that crumpled note on the morning the children were taken to Ma Brown.

The neighbors went home to their neglected

work rejoicing, and Aunt Clara began her daily round weeping for joy. Her husband and the sheriff drove to the town where the letter was posted, for further news, hoping to find the little girls. With the help of the policemen and the directory they visited every family by the name of Brown, but no one could give them the least information. Not a soul by the name of Brown had ever heard of two stray children.

It was certainly a mystery, and the Carters and all in their neighborhood were again thrown into a state of dread and anxiety. A telegram was sent at once to a reliable detective agency in New York City, and again no one could do anything but talk the situation over and over, and speculate as to what could, or would, be done now.

The agency responded promptly with a message advising secrecy until a man, whom they would send by the first train, could reach them. But Ma Brown's telegram came almost at the same time, and the agency was wired to wait until further advice before sending their man.

There was nothing to do but to wait for the letter promised in Ma Brown's message. Aunt Clara was ill in bed now from wakefulness, grief

and anxiety, and neighbors took care of her and Benny and the other little children. They put the telegram in her hands, and when she read the comforting words, she said faintly, "It's all right," and closed her eyes in sleep for the first time since she knew that her nieces were lost.

But most people thought matters were far from "all right," and that the mystery still continued. The telegram was sent from Syracuse, New York, at least fifty miles from the post-office where Nick had mailed his brief letter.

Something must be wrong or the children would not be so far away. On the other hand, why had messages been sent at all, if the girls had been really kidnapped?

"Some skullduggery," was the comment of the sheriff. "If I was Carter I wouldn't wait for that letter too long."

"You don't really expect a letter do ye, Mr. Sheriff?" asked one of the men.

"Not much, like as not it's some ruse to gain time. You never can tell what them scamps are up to."

When the train came in which was expected to bear the important letter, if it was really sent, the

little village was crowded full of an excited throng, and the postmaster had some trouble in getting himself and his mail bag safely into the little room where the letters and papers were emptied upon a broad table. Ma Brown's letter and the two picture postals were seized in a twinkling and were in the hands of Mr. Carter. While he was reading the letter the cards were passed around from hand to hand among the crowd.

"By gum that's them," shouted an old farmer.

"And all slicked up as fine as a fiddle," said another.

"That old woman ain't no kidnapper," remarked some one, "I'd as soon think of accusin' my grandmother of such a thing."

"What does the letter say, Carter?" asked the sheriff.

"I can't make it out very well," he replied, "but they're with a circus, and the writer says they'll send 'em home as soon's we telegraph for 'em."

"Well, don't that beat ye!" said the old farmer, thumping on his neighbor's back with his closed fist.

Shouts and laughter went up from the crowd,

men waved their hats and women cried as they looked at the image of dear old Ma Brown's sweet, homely face on the post cards.

"She'll never let any harm come to them kids," said one of them.

"But you'll send that telegram to have 'em come home right off, won't ye, Mr. Carter," asked an anxious little woman by his side.

Mr. Carter put the postals and letter in his pocket as he answered wisely.

"I guess I better leave that to my wife."

CHAPTER XII

AUNT CLARA'S LETTERS

WHEN Mrs. Carter woke from her long sleep, rested and refreshed, her husband was by her bedside with the letter and post cards.

“We must send a telegram right off,” he said as soon as she had read them all. “Do you feel well enough to think what we would better say?”

She looked again for a long time at the photographs and read Ma Brown's words once more before answering.

“She's a good kind woman,” she said at last. “I think we ought to telegraph to her to keep the girls until she hears from us again. That will give us time to think it over.”

Mr. Carter agreed to this. The message was sent and Ma Brown received it in time to give her a good night's sleep.

A council of old friends, including the minister, was called by the Carters before the letter was written. Most of the advice was in favor of sending for the children at once. But their aunt

thought differently. "Think what she has done for those children," she said. "Nursed them, clothed them and gave them a chance to make some money, and all she asks in return is to keep them a little longer. How can we be so ungrateful as to refuse her."

"But the influences about them!" urged the minister. "You don't want those children to be exposed to the vice and wickedness of a traveling circus."

"Mr. Gorham, just look at that face," said Aunt Clara, handing him the postal. "There's no vice or wickedness there, nothing but love and kindness, and she says she'll take care of those children. I feel like trusting her, especially as Ab seems to think she's all right. She wouldn't be holding her hand if she didn't. Addy—bless her heart—loves everybody."

"You can bet Ab's keen on the money proposition," said Mr. Carter, laughing.

"The poor child knows how much they need it," said the aunt, "but I wouldn't let that count if I did not feel sure that no harm can come to them under the protection of that good motherly woman. I don't know how she comes to be travel-

ing round that way, but I'm sure there's a good reason for it."

"Well," said the minister at last, after an hour's discussion, "I think we can trust Mrs. Carter's instincts. By the time Mrs. Brown hears from you again the girls will have been with her almost a week, and a few more days won't make much difference."

And so the matter was left. The children were to be allowed to stay two weeks with the circus, with the full consent of the minister. Ma Brown's honest kindly face on the post card had won over the parson, whose coöperation Mrs. Carter felt to be very necessary in the step she was taking.

She rose very early the next morning before any one else was stirring, and wrote her answer to Ma Brown's letter.

"DEAR MRS. BROWN,—I can't thank you enough for your kindness to our children. Your thoughtfulness in sending the telegram, letter and post cards has saved us from a great deal of anxiety and misery. After seeing your face in the photograph and reading your words, my husband and I are sure we can trust you, and the least we can do to re-

pay you for all you have done, is to let the girls stay with you for a fortnight as you request. We are very poor and the girls must soon make their own living, so we are very glad they can have this chance to earn so much money.

“Please send them to Albany when you are through with them. My husband will meet them there and bring them home.

“We are anxious to know more particulars about how they were lost, and found. Please ask the girls to write to us often and tell us all the news.

“Very truly and thankfully yours,

“CLARA CARTER.”

She read the letter over before putting it in the envelope. It seemed cold and reserved, not at all expressing the depth of gratitude and appreciation she really felt. But she was a New Englander. It was impossible to put in words any deep feeling. The letter would have to go as it was written. But it satisfied Ma Brown and made her happy and cheerful as she busied herself with her housekeeping duties on the Sunday morning it was received. She was still very much troubled

about Nick, but she felt sure she could manage in some way to have him punished and yet save him.

The manager of the circus always engaged a good lawyer in every city where they stopped to look out for its interests, in matters of dispute which always came up when they had dealings with the country people. She meant to consult him the next day, and find out, if possible, more about that Colorado judge who was so kind and just, and humane to boy criminals, and put Nick's case in his hands.

She could not show Ab or Addy their aunt's letter, for she did not want them to know of Nick's dishonesty, but she advised them to write to her a full account of their adventure in the woods and how they were found and brought to the circus for care.

Ab liked to write letters, and was willing to begin the task at once. So Ma Brown gave her paper and ink, and then with Addy's help began to take care of Jennie Lind and her babies.

"Your aunt's had a lot of schoolin' hasn't she?" she asked the little girl as they worked together.

"Oh, yes," she said, "she graduated at the

Academy. And she taught school before she was married," added Ab, looking up from her writing.

"That's nice," said Ma Brown, "and I s'pose she wants you to go to school."

"She says we must graduate at the Academy too," returned Addy, "and teach school afterward. But Ab says she'd rather work on a farm."

"A farm," echoed Ma Brown, smiling. "Well, that tickles me, for farmin' is just what I like, too. I lived on one all my life till I came here. I've got a big one in Ioway, and that's my home now. I git awful homesick for it sometimes."

"How many acres have you got, grandma?" asked Ab, her brown eyes shining with interest.

"Two hundred, dearie, and all of 'em under the plow except twenty-five of timber. It's awful rich land. Ye ought to see the crops that come off it every year."

"I wish I could," said Ab emphatically. "That's the kind of farm I want to live on."

"Bless yer heart, dearie, I wisht you was grown up now and could help managin' my place," said Ma Brown heartily. "I have the hardest kind of times gettin' any body to do it right. Lots of women and girls are farming now."

“Don’t you s’pose we could go to see you sometimes on your farm, grandma?” asked Addy.

“Why, yes, honey, of course ye can. Why not?”

She looked at the child fixedly with an uplifted spoon in her hand, as though she was struck with a new idea.

Why should she not have the children instead of Mr. Higgins? But there was Nick! She had been thinking of sending him to her farm in Iowa. But she could not have him live with these innocent little girls. She believed him to be too bad for that. She would have to think of some other plan. While she was turning this problem over in her mind another letter came from Mrs. Carter which made Ma Brown very happy, and gave her quite a different opinion of the poor outcast. The letter enclosed two notes from Nick. One written on the morning he had found the girls and another which had just reached her, and which, like the first, was not dated, or signed. It simply read:

“Kids gitin’ wel. Makin’ money. Goin’ home purty quick.”

Mrs. Carter explained that she and her husband had been somewhat puzzled by the mysteri-

ous notes, and had thought best to send them on to Ma Brown with the hopes that she could throw some light on them; as the writer was evidently with the circus. They were anxious to know his name, so that they might thank him for writing. His first note had relieved them of great anxiety.

Ma Brown understood at once that Nick had been trying in a clumsy way to prevent the guardians of the children from being anxious about them, and at the same time to be sure of keeping them long enough to make money for himself, as well as helping them to earn more. She believed him to be too ignorant and simple to realize what he had actually done, and gave him credit for thinking that he was doing what would be really best for all concerned, and that he would have to manage the business in his usual underhanded way, and she was immensely relieved to find that he had not been hard and wicked as she had feared, and was really at heart kind and loving, as she had always thought him to be.

She made up her mind to tell no one but Nick himself about the letters, and so save the poor weak boy from too severe a punishment for his silly trick. Fortunately no harm would come

from it—thanks to her prompt action, and she could wait for a good opportunity to lecture Nick, and perhaps make him see how foolish, as well as wicked, it is to be dishonest.

She wrote to Mrs. Carter that the notes were from the ignorant boy who had found her nieces on the mountain, and that he was now helping her take good care of the little girls, who were still very well and happy.

She sat for a long time after that with her pen in her hand, trying to think how to say she wished to adopt the sisters. It was not easy for her to express herself in writing, and she was almost sure she would seem to the aunt so ignorant and stupid that she would not think of entrusting them to her. Besides, she was an entire stranger and at the best such a proposal would seem presumptuous.

She was feeling rather discouraged, when it suddenly occurred to her, to write to her old pastor at home and ask him to do the difficult task for her. He would do it so much better than she could, and she was sure he would speak of her good character, of her rich farm and her ability to carry out her promise to take excellent care of

the children and give them a good education. She was not afraid to write to the dear old man who had known her all her life. He would not mind her mistakes in grammar or bad spelling, and she believed he would be glad to do her this service. She was alone in her quiet room. She could not have a better time to write her important letter. Besides, there was no time to lose. It would take almost a week for letters to travel before she could hear from the aunt, and the time was slipping away very fast. In about ten days, according to the agreement, the children would have to be taken home.

It was hard work, but the long letter was finished at last and posted, and Ma Brown sat down to rest in her little rocking chair—very tired but serene and contented.

CHAPTER XIII

DAMILEAU

“**B**ON JOUR, Madame.”

Ma Brown jumped up hastily when she heard the words and faced her visitor with an embarrassed smile.

“I don’t know what yer sayin’, ma’am, but I’m right glad to see ye. Won’t ye come in an’ set down?”

She pushed the wicker chair toward her caller who hastened to say apologetically, “Please pardon, Madame. I meant only to wish you ‘good morning’ in English, but the other words would come before I could stop them, for you look so like my dear Aunt Julie in my own France, it is difficult to believe you are not she.” The impulsive foreigner clasped both of Ma Brown’s fat hands as she spoke.

“Is that a fact? Well, now, I feel right flattered and I’m glad ye came, for you must be awful homesick and lonesome with none of your folks around,” said Ma Brown kindly.

Her visitor sat down in the little wicker chair, folded her hands on her lap and said sadly, "I'm very lonely, Madame."

Before Ma Brown could think of anything comforting to say, she added brightly, "But I am selfish. No one can have all the good things. I am thankful to be here to earn the much money. You Americans are most generous."

"Well, they say you're a nawful good rider. I guess you earn all they give ye."

"I rode well in Paris," said the young woman quickly, "but I had always the little salary. No, madame, it is true all Americans are most kind. I think my dear Aunt Julie is here when you look at me so lovingly."

"Is your pa and ma livin'?" asked Ma Brown sitting down and picking up her knitting.

"No, Madame. They are both gone. There is only one sister left beside me in our once large family. My sister lives with Aunt Julie in the country. She is a dear child and I long to see her."

"Well, time flies away fast for all of us. You'll soon be goin' home to your folks, I expect," said Ma Brown cheerfully.

“One year more, Madame, must I work. In my three years in this country I have saved from my large salary almost enough to keep my aunt in comfort as long as she lives—and my sister, too.”

“You work awful hard, I expect,” said Ma Brown sympathetically.

“Yes, Madame. My life is not easy. I am with the circus through the summer, and ride in the Hippodrome in the city in the winters. I have no vacations. But I wish none. I only desire to work so hard that the time may come soon when I may go home.”

“Hank ud hate to see ye go,” remarked Ma Brown. “He thinks yer about the best one in the lot.”

“Ah, Mr. Bellman is the kindest man I ever knew,” returned Damileau. “He is generous! He is noble!”

Ma Brown was much pleased, but she was also embarrassed, and laughed a little as she said, “I expect Loly would say that was French palaver. But Hank is a nice feller. He’s awful good to me.”

“Indeed, Madame, I am most sincere. Mr. Bell-

man has always treated me with the utmost kindness, and what goes to my heart, with respect and justice. I have not with him to battle for my rights as with some men with whom I have had to deal."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," said Ma Brown. "Though he ain't so different from all our American men. The most of 'em is decent to their women folks."

"I must think he is better than many," said the French woman, "and your beautiful daughter seems to have more than the usual number of gifts."

"Do you think Loly is pretty?" said Ma Brown eagerly.

"Pretty! Madame! She is superb!"

The mother flushed with pleasure, as she said, "Most folks thinks Loly's good lookin'. I don't know about that, but she's a good girl."

"No one could doubt it, Madame. It must be hard for your daughter to give up home life and wander about with her husband."

"I wish 'twas," said Ma Brown wistfully. "'Cause then Hank ud leave the circus in a minit. It's a dog's life and he's sick of it. But Loly,

pore child! she's just set her heart on bein' a first rate circus rider, and that's why we stay."

"Ah, Mon Dieu! How can that be possible?" The foreigner threw up her hands in genuine surprise. "She needs not to earn her living. She is beautiful. She has a dear mother and a devoted husband. She might have a sweet home and children. She gives that all up for what? To ride a horse with her foot in the air, to gain the applause of some vulgar people for whom she does not care!"

Mademoiselle Damileau rose in her excitement and began walking up and down the little sitting room.

Her hostess looked at her thoughtfully as she said, "Well, ain't it funny the way things is in this world? Now Loly, she is awful jealous o' you. She thinks if she could ride like you do, she'd be the happiest girl that ever was."

"Jealous of *me*," the French artiste said incredulously. "Ah, Madame, it must be you speak in jest. I stand well in my profession, yes, and that is good, for without the money I earn I and my dear ones would starve. But I do not love it.

How gladly would I give it all for—Madame, I am jealous of women with homes.”

Cindy stuck her head into the room and called out, “Shall I bring in Jennie Lind now, Mis’ Brown? The parade’s comin’ back, and I’m ’fraid the boys’ll come round and bother her like they did yiste’day.”

“Yes, fetch her in, Cindy,” said Ma Brown, and then apologetically to her visitor, “I expect you’ll think it’s queer for me to be travelin’ round with an old settin’ hen.”

“On the contrary, I think it is charming. I long to see her. Aunt Julie is most fond of her fowls.”

“Well, here she is,” said Ma Brown as the colored girl set the cage on the floor.

“You go now, and make Miss Dammyloo a nice glass o’ lemonade, Cindy,” said her mistress as she lifted the cloth from the cage so that the little chicks came out.

“I ain’t got time, Mis’ Brown,” said the girl in a surly tone. “Miss Loly told me to fix her bureau draws agin she comes back.”

“Do you want me to tell your mistress you wouldn’t do what I told you, Cindy?”

The girl shrugged her shoulders, muttering

something under her breath about "ornery fur-riners" and went into the little pantry where they soon heard her cracking ice.

Mademoiselle Damileau had already won Ma Brown's heart, but she felt still more drawn toward her when she turned and saw her visitor on her knees before the cage, holding a downy little creature close to her lips, while her eyes were filled with tears. Ma Brown appeared not to notice this, and bustled off to prepare food for her pets. When she returned she brought with her the lemonade, fearing that Cindy could not be counted on to be polite to the enemy of her beloved mistress.

"I suppose you don't drink lemonade in your country, Miss Damyloo, like we do," said Ma Brown, offering a large glass to her visitor. "We all think it tastes pretty good on a hot day."

The French woman drank the cool beverage with many thanks, and then said she must go. She had made her call too long.

"May I kiss you for my aunt, dear madame?" she said almost timidly. "I have not been so happy since I saw her last."

"Why, of course you may, you poor child," said

Ma Brown affectionately. "And I want you should come and see me whenever you feel like it."

"You are so good to a poor stranger! I will be so happy if I may."

She was gone when Madame Ossilena returned from the parade, and came to her mother's car as usual for a chat. After the cool drink which was always waiting for her, she began playing with the chickens, while she heard of the visit of her rival.

"You let her pull the wool over your eyes, Ma, I suppose," said the daughter when she was told of the likeness to Aunt Julie and of the admiration for Hank and envy of Lola's beauty and grace.

"Daughter, it ain't right for you to talk that way about her; you ain't acquainted, be you?" said the mother seriously.

"Oh, she tries to honey round me like she does to you and Hank. But I ain't stuck on folks with so much soft soap. I know her well enough. She's just laughin' at me in her sleeve, 'cause I can't ride like she can."

Ma Brown saw there was no use in trying to overcome her daughter's prejudice, so she wisely changed the subject by saying:

"Is Maginnis gettin' up a new stunt for you, honey?"

Lola jumped up from her seat on the floor, and sinking into a chair, said impressively:

"Ma, it's goin' to be the biggest thing out! Maginnis came over to tell Hank and me about it last evening. He said he thought it out in the night."

"Is that so! Do tell me about it, darlin'," said Ma Brown, beaming.

"Well, set down, Ma, and here's your knittin'. You can't never listen without that."

"What is he goin' to call it?" asked Ma Brown, beginning to unwind her ball of yarn.

"The Empress of the Ring." Lola waved her hands and spoke slowly to express the splendor evoked by the name.

"My! my! but that sounds fine. I s'pose Hank'll git ye some lovely clothes fur it."

"Yes. He told Maginnis to go ahead and have the tailor order everything he wanted. There's

to be a satin petticoat and a long white silk robe, embroidered with gold, and a crown of diamonds, and I don't know what all."

"Ye can't ride in them things, can ye?"

"Course not! Let me tell you how he's fixed that. He's goin' to have the kids act as pages, and after I've sa-gashiated round the ring to slow music, the pages'll take off the long robe and petticoat—they'll only be hooked on and they can do it quick—and then I'll—. But I sha'n't tell you the rest, you'll have to come and see. Hank says it'll be the best thing on the program."

"Well, dearie, I'm glad ye've got somethin' new to make ye happy. I s'pose the General and little Marthy'll do their parts all right."

"Oh, of course," said Lola carelessly. "It's very little they have to do."

"They are awful nice little girls. I've got to likin' 'em so much. I'll miss 'em somethin' awful when they're gone," remarked Ma Brown.

"Well, why don't you keep em. Hank'll find 'em somethin' to do when the Eytalians gits back."

"I've thought of that," said her mother. "But you know the circus ain't no place to bring up chil-

dren in. I'd like to take 'em to Ioway to the farm and send 'em to school. But I don't believe their folks would hear to that."

"How do you know so much about their folks, ma?"

"I've written to the aunt and she's written to me, and she'd never let a pore old ign'rant critter like me have 'em nohow."

Ma Brown spoke in a sad discouraged way, quite unlike her usual cheerful self, and Lola rushed over to her side to shake and kiss her at the same time.

"Now, you just stop that kind of talk, Ma," she said, scolding. "I won't have it—you're just as good as anybody in this whole world, and a whole lot better than most folks, and if you want them kids, you're a-goin' to have 'em."

"Bless your good heart, darlin'," said her mother, laughing and wiping her tears away. "I knew you and Hank 'ud git me anything I wanted if ye could. But I guess you'd better let me manage about the little girls. I'm goin' to write to their aunt again pretty soon, and we'll see."

CHAPTER XIV

INSTALLING A CIRCUS

IT was five o'clock in the morning when Addy and Ab crept cautiously from the door of "Brown Sugar," while Ma Brown was taking her last nap, and ran to Madame Ossilena's car, where they stopped beneath Cindy's open window, from which a red string dangled. Addy took hold of this and gave it several sharp, quick jerks. In a moment, a woolly head was stuck out and Cindy said in a hoarse whisper, "I'll be there tureckly," and then disappeared. They had not long to wait before she came out dressed for the street, in a gay black and red plaid gown, and a jaunty little black hat with a red feather, and carrying a bright green parasol which she immediately opened and held over her head.

"You don't need that this morning. See, the sun isn't shining," said Ab.

"I reckon I knows what I needs," said Cindy, reprovingly.

Ab laughed, and the three scampered toward a



"I RECKON I KNOWS WHAT I NEEDS," SAID CINDY,
REPROVINGLY

train some distance away where a great many men and horses were at work.

The children had been told that they might get up early some morning, to see the circus tents put up. Cindy had begged to go along with them, and her good-natured mistress had readily given permission. She could never waken without help, as Ab and Addy did, so when the time for this adventure had been decided upon they had contrived the device of tying a string to her wrist, which Ab could pull from the outside to arouse her.

The great circus moved in trains divided into three sections, each section having about twenty cars of unusual length. The first section was called the baggage train, and carried the workmen and work-horses, and the tents and everything needed to put them in place. In the second and third trains were the tableaux wagons, the elephants and camels and their keepers, the performing, ring and baggage horses, all kinds of wagons and the baggage of the performers, the sleeping cars, and all the cages.

The sisters and Cindy were in time to see the cook wagons and those filled with stakes and chains roll down inclined planes from the cars to

the ground, where horses were fastened to them and they at once followed the great vans which were carrying the huge canvases and tent poles to the "lot," which was half a mile away.

The children ran along the road, passing the long train of lumbering wagons, and soon reached the ten-acre meadow which was to be the home of the circus for that day. They looked around for Nick at once, as Mr. Bellman had arranged to have him meet them there to guide them so that they could see everything to the best advantage.

Cindy was very angry when she heard this, and declared that she wasn't goin' to have that ornery Imp bossin' *her* 'round. She knew as much about the show as he did!

"What will you do when he comes," asked Addy.

"I kin take keer o' muself," she muttered, tossing her head and walking off as Nick joined them. They were sorry to have her go, but were too much absorbed to think much about it, as they watched a tall man with a straw hat on the back of his head unwind a long metal tape line. The questions began at once.

“What’s he going to do with that?” asked Addy.

“That’s the boss canvas man,” said Nick. “He’s goin’ to mark off the ground to tell where the tents is to be put.”

They had to walk fast to keep pace with the boss, who followed the glittering line, sticking quickly into the ground slender iron rods at regular intervals. Nick explained that these were to show where to drive the strong wooden stakes which held the tent ropes in place. Men seemed to spring from the ground in every direction—each one working with wonderful speed and never making mistakes. In a few minutes the whole space appeared to be covered with wooden stakes which gangs of workmen drove into the ground with big sledge hammers.

The first canvas put up was the cook tent. The wagons with ranges were placed inside, and busy cooks were preparing breakfast in ten minutes after they reached the grounds. The children wondered where the immense piles of provisions came from which were already there waiting for them: such as cans of milk, barrels of potatoes

and other vegetables, quantities of meat, and all kinds of fruit. Nick told them that agents had been sent weeks in advance to engage all sorts of supplies for man and beast; and that other agents had been there just before the circus was expected, to see that everything had been delivered in time, and at the right place.

Addy was especially interested in this department. She strayed away from the others and stood by a long board and watched a row of men in clean white caps and aprons, cutting meat into pieces and putting them into big kettles. Then her attention was called to the placing of long benches near some big hogsheads filled with water. She was wondering what these were for, when a boy came along with a push cart loaded with tin washbowls. These were set close together on the benches, with soap in a shallow dish by the side of each bowl. The boy then fastened one end of a rope to a small tree and the other to a post in the cook tent, and threw over it a great many large crash towels, and then Addy knew without asking any questions that the workmen would enjoy a good wash before eating their breakfasts. She then walked among the tables and the boxes

and barrels scattered about on the grass, peeping into a chicken coop full of live "broilers," and lifting lids off kegs of pickles, jars of honey and cans of milk, to see what was in them. She was just thinking that circus folks lived pretty well, when she felt herself lifted from behind, and in a moment was hanging over a large brass kettle, while the white-capped cook who held her said to another one:

"This is what I've been lookin' for to flavor my soup—I hain't had a bunch o' gawp for a good while, and this one's nice and green. Bring along a sharp knife, George, and let's cut it up while it's fresh!"

Addy wriggled out of the man's hands and ran off frightened and indignant to join Ab and Nick, who were now watching a pair of enormous gray horses tugging with all their strength at ropes which drew into place a tall center pole. Dozens of men on their knees were lacing together the canvas of the tent, which was lying in sections spread out on the ground; others were placing poles, which Nick said were twelve feet high and as many feet apart, ready for the edge of the "big top" to be fastened to them. It was a won-

derful sight when the great mass of canvas began to rise from the ground, horses and shouting men pulling on ropes to draw it into place; first to the top of the center poles, and then spreading it over other poles at the sides, fastening on the side walls and tightening the guy ropes. It was all over so quickly that it seemed like the work of magic.

The children followed Nick, who took them next to see the smaller tents, which had been put up while they were watching the big one rise. These were the menagerie, side-show, stable, blacksmith, harness, dressing, wardrobe and barber tents—and already they were busy places. In the blacksmith-shop men in leather aprons were heating irons at forges, and horses were standing near waiting to be shod; while waxed threads and long needles were being prepared for mending piles of harness in the harness tent.

“What’s she doing?” asked Addy, as they came to the wardrobe tent, and saw a gray-haired woman sorting some bright colored garments and laying them in piles on a table.

“That’s the circus mother. She’s gettin’ things ready to be mended. Circus folks is awful hard on their clothes.”

"I didn't know there were two circus mothers," cried Addy.

"There ain't."

"But there's Ma Brown, everybody calls her that."

"*She* ain't no circus mother," said Nick, with emphasis.

"What does the circus mother do?" asked Ab.

"She's all right; she looks after the girls and women when they're sick, and gives advice to everybody, and things like that."

"Ma Brown does that, too," persisted Ab; "then what's the difference between 'em?"

Nick was silent for a minute, evidently trying to put in words the distinction which was in his mind, and finally said: "The circus mother is just a guy like the rest of us; Ma Brown's the hull thing."

The little girls were not very much enlightened, but they were now interested in the stable tent, which was very long and low, and seemed to be crowded with horses. Nick told them the show carried five hundred of these animals altogether.

"Will they eat all those?" asked Addy, pointing to several big stacks of hay which a number of

farm wagons had just left on the edge of the grounds.

“No, that’s for the elephants; they’re awful big eaters, you can’t never fill ’em up. They’ll eat all that hay today, and lots of barrels of apples and potatoes and loaves of bread.”

“It must cost a lot to feed everybody and all the animals in a circus,” remarked Addy.

“I should say!” said Nick. “It costs five thousand dollars a day to run this show.”

“They take in more money than that, don’t they?” asked Ab.

“Sometimes when it rains all day they don’t.”

“How many people can be seated in the big tent?” asked Addy.

“Fifteen thousand.”

“How much does the circus take in when the seats are full?”

“I don’t know; there’s as many as a thousand dead heads—folks that have free tickets; and kids only pay half price. But they take in a lot at the side-shows and the peanut and lemonade stands. I guess they make money enough; I ain’t worryin’ enough to keep me awake nights about their goin’ to the poor house,” remarked Nick.

“What cunning little horses,” said Addy, as a dozen or more Shetland ponies were led by. They seemed to be very lively, some of them rearing and plunging. “Look out for their heels!” cautioned Nick. “They’re vicious critters. They’d kick their grandmother if they got a chance. I know all about ’em; it’s my job to take care of ’em. I’ll have to go and feed ’em now, before breakfast. I guess you don’t need me no more.” He ran off and left the sisters who now walked slowly toward the entrance.

CHAPTER XV

CINDY'S ADVENTURE

BY this time the menagerie animals had reached the grounds in their cages, the elephants waddling along on foot, hungry for their breakfasts. All the apparatus for the show was unloaded and put in place, and the glittering bandwagon and steam piano were placed under an awning, where the children watched for a moment a number of men polishing the brass ornaments. The circus actors began to come in throngs, most of them on foot, though some had ridden on the trolley cars, and one or two were with Mr. Bellman in a large two-seated carriage. All of them, riders, ring-masters, animal trainers, jugglers, clowns and ticket sellers, turned in the direction of the cook tent, where breakfast was waiting for them. Mr. Bellman sent the carriage back for Ma Brown, and, noticing the children, stopped a moment to ask if they had seen all they wanted to. Cindy came up to them now. She had not been

having a very good time alone. She had tried to join a party of town boys and girls, who were swarming over the grounds, but they had evidently distrusted her, and ran away when she spoke to them.

“Ask him kin we see 'em feed the animals,” Cindy whispered to Ab, who immediately begged eagerly for this permission.

Mr. Bellman smiled, took a note-book from his pocket, scribbled a few words, tore the sheet out, and handing it to the child remarked, “I guess if you're careful and don't get too near, they won't eat you up. Give this to the head trainer and he'll let you in.”

Addy rather dreaded this part of their adventure. She liked elephants and camels and monkeys, but she never enjoyed being very near lions, tigers, hyenas and other wild creatures which showed their teeth and growled and roared. But as they were to wait for Ma Brown before they had their breakfast, there seemed nothing else to do, so she ran after the others and went with them to the menagerie tent.

A gruff man in overalls met them at the entrance. “Git out o' here,” he began, threaten-

ingly; but after reading the slip of paper Ab handed him he let them in, remarking briefly to another man in overalls, "the boss's kids."

The second man was better natured, and told them to follow him, but to be careful not to get in anybody's way. This advice was not very easy to follow, for men and half-grown boys were rushing about the large tent in all directions, carrying hay and vegetables to the elephants. The lions, tigers and other big animals of the cat family were dashing about their cages, which had been just cleaned and littered with fresh straw and sawdust; they were roaring angrily, the elephants were trumpeting, the monkeys chattering, and the camels were making a queer sound between a bellow and a groan. Addy clung to Cindy very much terrified, as they walked along.

"Don't ye be skeered," said the man kindly. "They can't git out to hurt ye. They'll stop that pow-wow as soon's they're fed."

Pieces of fresh beef and mutton, each weighing several pounds, were now being thrown into the cages through small doors, the hungry beasts pouncing on them at once, and in a few moments

all the animals were quietly munching meat or other food.

“Come and see how we wean the tiger’s babies,” said their guide, leading the children and Cindy to a large cage some distance away from the others. A thick green cloth covered the cage entirely. When this was taken away by two men the sisters saw a large tigress lying on the floor with two lively little cubs running over her, very much as kittens play with their mothers. The moment she saw the men, the tigress became excited and jumped up, roaring and lashing her tail. When a piece of meat was thrown to her she paid no attention to it, but kept on walking back and forth, now and then dashing at the bars trying to get at her enemies. One man kept her attention by poking a stick through the bars and drawing it back quickly when she jumped at it; while two others contrived, by a long pole with a cross-piece of wood fastened on it, to poke the cubs out of a small door which a third man opened at the back of the cage behind the tigress. The tiger babies fell one after another into a large basket outside, a cover was fastened over them and they were

carried quickly away. They cried and whined as though in great distress, and their mother answered with a mournful cry quite unlike her angry growls and roars.

"It's too bad to take her babies away when she feels so bad about it," said Addy, as they ran after the men with the basket.

"Oh, she'll git over it as soon's the cubs stop their yap," said the man; "just you wait and see."

A small cage stood ready for the little tigers, who stopped their plaintive wails as soon as they were placed inside of it, and began gnawing some bones of raw meat with much relish.

"Are you going to take 'em back to their mother?" asked Ab.

"Yes, when the show's over she'll have 'em again for the night. But they're gettin' so old now they'll soon be weaned altogether."

"Won't that be hard for her?" asked Addy.

"She won't care so long as she don't hear 'em cryin' for her; she'll soon forgit 'em."

Cindy seemed to be fascinated by the pretty cat-like creatures in the cage, and she pressed close to the bars to watch them while she called

them pet names in a crooning voice. The keepers were much amused at her interest, and one of them suddenly picked her up and put her in the empty basket, saying: "I reckon we'd better take this cub back to the tigress so she won't be so lonesome."

Cindy was sixteen years old, but she was very small, and as she wore short dresses was thought by strangers to be a child. However, she had a very different notion of her importance. She considered herself entirely grown up and able to take care of herself. She was therefore furiously angry at the insult now put upon her. She screamed with rage, and springing from the basket ran after the unlucky keeper who had so hurt her dignity, declaring that she meant to kill him. She was very quick, and though he dodged her as they raced round the tent, she was almost upon him when he darted through the open door, Cindy in hot pursuit. Half a dozen men laughed uproariously, and followed to see the fun. The offending keeper would have been lost in the crowd outside if Nick had not been passing the tent just at that moment. He had heard Cindy's wrathful cry, and guessing at the cause, put out his foot

quickly in the path of the fleeing culprit, tripping and throwing him to the ground. In an instant she was on her knees beside him, beating him over the head and shoulders with her parasol, while several of the keepers held him still on the ground.

“Give it to him,” “Go it, tiger cat,” “Kill him, kill him!” cried the spectators who had gathered around the group, while others came running from all directions to see what was going on. But after several resounding blows Cindy’s frail little parasol broke in her hands. She rose to her feet and began to cry.

“What’s the matter, Cindy, are you hurt?” asked Ab, who had wriggled through the crowd and was now by her side.

“My pa’sol is sp’iled,” wailed the black girl, showing the pieces in her hands. “I spent all my money gettin’ this one; Miss Loly won’t let me buy no mo’.”

“Here’s some money to git yerse’f a new one,” said the man she had beaten, who now stopped laughing and came up to her with a fifty cent piece in his hand. “I was mean to tease ye, and I’m right sorry, but I was only in fun.”

“We’ll all chip in and help out,” said another

keeper. "Here, Imp, you pass round the hat."

Nick pulled off his cap and walked rapidly among the people who had seen the fracas. Every one threw in a coin, and in a few moments he came back and counted two dollars and ten cents into Cindy's eager hand. The sum was rather a bulky one, as the coins were mostly pennies and nickels, but it seemed great riches to Cindy. She chuckled happily, as she slipped the money in her pocket and started for the trains, while the little girls with Nick raced to the cook tent with sharp appetites for their belated breakfasts.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CIRCUS FAIRY

THE children were anxious to attend a performance of the circus as soon as possible, and so were very much pleased when Ma Brown proposed to take them to one, on the afternoon of the next day. "We'll set in a box and put on style," she said patting her smooth gray hair with her fat palms.

"Sit in a box!" echoed Addy. "What does that mean?"

"Little railed off places where people sit by themselves," said Ma Brown. "In the cities they have lots of 'em. The circus can't carry 'em round when it's on the road, but Hank always has one for Loly and me so we can have a comfortable place to set."

"Do you go often?" asked Addy.

"I used to, but I got sick of it, I don't go now only when I have company!"

"I'd never get tired of seeing a show!" said Addy emphatically.

“Yes you would, honey,” said Ma Brown, in her soft placid tones. “If you was to go to one six days runnin’ you’d be so sick of it you’d never want to go to another.”

The little girl laughed and shook her head, and as she had by this time fastened a leading chain to Puck’s neck, they all set out for the big tent.

It was a warm day, and Ma Brown seemed to feel the heat very much, although she held a parasol over her bare head and fanned herself with a palm leaf fan. But the little girls did not think of the weather. They were too much excited for that as they came within reach of the sights and sounds and smells of the show.

It was early, but there were a great many visitors swarming about, and more were pouring into the enclosure all the time. There was a jam before the ticket sellers’ wagons, and the side shows were filling up rapidly. All the grown people seemed to be eager and hurried as they clutched each other’s hands or dragged along little children, who would have stood still in wonder and awe if left to themselves.

“What makes everybody hurry so at circuses?” asked Ab.

“I expect the noise excites 'em,” said Ma Brown as she stopped in the shade of a tent to close her umbrella. “But it's all right. Most of 'em has it too quiet to home. This stirs 'em up and does 'em good.”

They stood there a moment looking at the great painted signs glaring in the sun, and listening to the deafening noises. Men with red faces were standing before the side-show tents, bellowing to the crowd to go inside to see the greatest wonders on earth, the living skeleton, the sword swallower, the five-legged pig, and all the other freaks, who were there expressly to educate as well as entertain them.

Then there were the men and boys who sold lemonade and peanuts, shrieking to everybody to come to them for refreshments, at the same time deftly making change for the eager buyers who crowded round their stands. Ticket sellers, or rather men who called attention to the ticket wagons, photograph and program vendors, and peddlers with captive balloons and other toys, helped to swell the noise and confusion, and through all these human sounds, could be heard

the squeaking, roaring, bellowing noises of the wild beasts in the menagerie.

Addy grew rather nervous and clung to Ma Brown's side, but Ab liked it, and said eagerly, "Can't we go to see the animals, grandma?"

"Of course! It wouldn't be much of a circus without them would it?"

As Ma Brown spoke she took her "pass" from her hand bag, and they wedged their way through the crowd to the door of the menagerie tent. The man there nodded, and they walked in to find themselves under a canvas roof, with a great throng of red faced perspiring people. The air was close and almost suffocating but no one seemed to mind it.

As they passed in procession before the cages of many strange, mysterious creatures, the children wanted to linger to watch them, but the crowd carried them along so that they had only fleeting glimpses of the great hippopotamus, the gnu, the sacred humped cattle and all the other two and four-footed beasts.

The monkey cage was so surrounded that it was impossible to get near it, and Ma Brown proposed

that they should go to the big tent, and come some other time to see the menagerie.

On their way out they passed a tall giraffe in his pen. His head almost touched the roof and as he stood very still looking off into space, as though he did not see anybody, Addy thought he seemed lonesome, and said in a whisper, "Don't you think he is homesick, grandma?"

"Like as not," she said with a smile. "Poor feller! I know how to pity him. But I never saw him so still. He's generally full of play. They have to muzzle him to keep him from nippin' the folks in the crowd."

"He's tied to that pole so he can't move his head, don't you see?" said Ab, pointing upward.

"Sure enough!" said Ma Brown. "I never saw that before. I s'pose they done that instead of muzzlin' him."

"And see the wire fastened to the pole," continued Ab. "What does that mean?"

"I'm sure I don't know. That's new, too," she answered.

"It's stretched across the tent to another pole," said Addy. "It looks like a tight rope."

"Ah! It must be a new stunt of Maginnis,"

said Ma Brown. "He's always thinkin' up tricks and trying them out. Let's stand here a minit and see."

They had not long to wait, for a tiny car now rose from a platform near them, and presently began to slide along under the wire and was evidently fastened to it like the sliding cash baskets which run on wires in department stores. The car was of wicker, shaped like a boat. It had in its prow a gossamer sail, and was so light and airy it looked as though a puff of wind would blow it away. In the car sat a fairy like creature, not larger than a child three years old, though she had a perfect woman's form. Her face was pretty, though not young, and she was dressed in some yellow stuff covered with spangles, a crown of jewels on her head, and a pair of little gilt wings fastened to her shoulders.

"Why! It's Mattie Green!" cried Ma Brown in great surprise. "I never saw the beat of Maginnis! To think of such a thing as that! My! But ain't it pretty!"

Everybody in the tent was looking up to the car which seemed to be floating slowly over their heads, and there were shrill cries and laughter

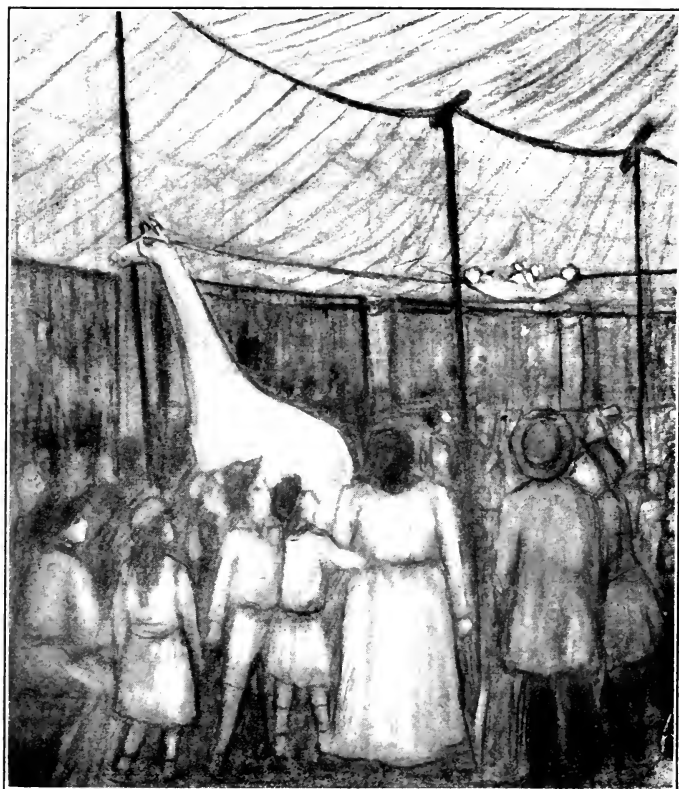
and clapping of hands when the fairy peered over the edge of her car and smiled down on them as she scattered roses on their heads.

“Did you say you know her, grandma?” said Addy who was very much excited. “I can hardly believe she is a real person. Are you sure she is not a fairy?”

“Why, of course not, honey,” said Ma Brown. “She’s one of the midgets here. She came from a place in Missouri where I’ve got cousins. She knows ’em well. That’s how I come to git acquainted with her. She’s an awful good girl. She’s always sending money to her folks, and she helps the poor a great deal.”

“See! she’s gone to the giraffe!” called Ab pointing to the car which now stopped close to the post where the tall animal was tied. He was evidently pleased to see his little visitor, for he put out his nose toward her in a gentle, friendly way, and taking the bunch of parsley she gave him began to eat it with great satisfaction.

She and her fairy craft seemed hardly larger than his head as she patted his nose, and then, standing on the edge of her boat she placed her finger on her lip, nodded with a roguish air, and



THE CIRCUS FAIRY

leaning forward seemed to whisper in the long ear of the giraffe, who went on munching, but shook his head as though a fly was bothering him.

It was a pretty sight, and the audience, clapped and roared its appreciation. The fairy seemed delighted with the applause. She laughed and threw kisses to the people, and taking her seat in the car, glided back on the wire to her platform scattering flowers as she went. There was a rush in her direction, but as her platform stood above the heads of every one, they could all see her as she stepped out. She bowed right and left with her hand on her heart, and then seeing Ma Brown who stood quite near her, she leaned over her low railing and called out in a squeaking voice, "Why! How de'do, Mis' Brown. I'm awful glad to see ye. You uns all well?"

"First rate," replied her old friend. "How's your folks?"

"Oh, they're right smart. Dad's rheumatiz is better."

"Oh, ain't she sweet!" "Too cute for anything!" "What a darling!" the women and children all about were exclaiming.

"Well, I got to go now," said the fairy. "Good-

by," and throwing kisses in all directions she suddenly disappeared.

"Why! where did she go? We didn't see her fly away," exclaimed the bewildered Addy.

"I expect they took her down out o' sight on a trap door," said Ma Brown. "But we'd better hurry now if we expect to see the show begin."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BOX PARTY

THE seats were filling fast, for a circus audience likes to be punctual, and the big brass band was playing some noisy music, when the little party hurried along the sawdust track to a small platform enclosed by a railing, and which stood by the entrance of the performers.

They bought some programs and several bags of peanuts, and then settled down in their comfortable chairs and began to look around.

"There's a big crowd here today. Hank'll be pleased," remarked Ma Brown, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Aren't the seats always full? I never saw them when they weren't," said Ab.

"Oh, my, no," returned the old lady, shaking her head. "Sometimes it rains for weeks without stoppin' and the seats are mor'n half empty. Then they don't take in enough to pay expenses, and everybody feels blue."

“I’m glad it doesn’t rain while we’re here,” said Addy.

“Yes, so’m I, I guess you’d find there wa’n’t much fun drippin’ round in the cold and wet like the poor circus folks has to do. We’ve had good weather so far this season,” she went on cheerfully, “and I guess we’d find there’s always a lot more sunshine than storm in this world if we’d stop to count up.”

The band now commenced to play a march, and she exclaimed: “Ah, here they come,” when almost immediately a dazzling procession began to file past their box. It was the usual pageant which opens a performance, and represented all the nations of the earth in correct costumes. There were Egyptians, Arabians, Chinese, Greeks, Indians and all the rest, many of them mounted on horses, camels and elephants; the beasts covered with trappings of crimson velvet and tinsel. There were hordes of foot soldiers in strange foreign armor, and great gilded chariots and floats in which were sitting beautiful women dressed as queens and surrounded by slaves, and there were any number of archers, trumpeters, knights, dancing girls, heralds, and so many more that one pair-

of eyes could not take in the spectacle. Presently the whole wide track around the three rings was filled with the moving multitude. It was a great mass of gorgeous form and color—very impressive to the audience while it lasted. But it soon passed out of sight, and Ma Brown said:

“Wouldn’t you like to be in that? It’s ever so much finer than the street parade.”

“I’d rather see it than be in it,” said Addy, “and I guess Puck would too.”

“Why! I think he liked being a footman,” exclaimed Ab. “Don’t you remember how he wagged his tail when we put on his uniform?”

“Yes, and isn’t it wonderful for him to do his part so well!” cried Addy, hugging the little dog.

“Yes, indeed!” said Ma Brown patting Puck’s head. “He did fine, Maginnis says. Where’d ye git him, honey?”

“He came to our house when we lived in Freeport, before Ma died,” said Addy. “Uncle Jacob says he is worth a good deal of money. But we never could find his owner to give him back, so we kept him. He knows lots of tricks—you ought to see him roll a barrel round.”

“Oh, I just love him, and he’s all mine now,”

cried Addy, fervently, pressing her cheek against Puck's handsome brown head.

"Look!" called Ab, excitedly, pointing to the ring where she had been watching some workmen laying a long strip of carpet on the ground. "That's Mr. Leontas and his boys. They're going to perform!"

"Yes, so 'tis," said Ma Brown, as a tall splendidly built man ran quickly into the ring followed by two slim half grown boys. The three were dressed in pink tights with a great deal of glittering ornament, and looked happy and smiling as they bowed to the audience before beginning a series of gymnastics. They were tumblers, and of course were perfectly trained. The little girls watched them breathlessly as they performed their difficult feats with graceful precision; then as they passed out to the dressing room Ma Brown asked, "Where did ye git to know them so soon, dearie?"

"I saw them yesterday at Dr. Kelly's office when you sent me for the medicine," said Ab. "The man had a sprained ankle, and his two boys were rubbing it. He was awful cross to them, and struck the biggest one for hurting him. The

doctor put a bandage on his ankle and the man limped when he walked."

"The doctor must have used some good stuff on it to make it get well so quick," remarked Addy.

"Ah, poor feller," said Ma Brown. "He has to act whether he's lame or not. If he should lay off he'd soon lose his job. I expect his ankle is hurtin' him terrible now."

"Why, how could he smile so then?" exclaimed Addy.

"That's part of the business, honey. All these people has paid their fifty cents to see a good show. They don't want to see no sour faces on the performers, and everybody's got to seem happy whether they be or not."

"But the boys like it anyway, don't they?" asked Ab, who found it hard to believe that it could be anything but fun to perform acrobatic feats in pink tights before an admiring audience.

"Poor boys!" said Ma Brown pityingly. "They're awful homesick, and the youngest one cries a good deal at night, so Maginnis told me. He wants to see his ma so bad, and she's way off in Greece. Their pa is terrible strict with 'em.

They have to work awful hard and never have no fun."

"Work!" echoed Ab. "I didn't know performers had anything to do but act."

"Why, dearie, did you think them acts they done just now was play? They have to practise 'em hours and hours every day, and they git whipped if they make mistakes. It's the hardest kind of a life. The oldest Leontas boy tried to run away once. He said he couldn't stand it any longer. But he was caught and brought back, and his pa punished him something awful."

Ab sat silent and thoughtful, watching the workmen laying rugs, poles, tight ropes and tables in the ring for the next act. It was a new idea entirely to her that anybody could wish to run away from a circus. She had supposed that all children were anxious to go with them. She was having such a good time herself that she could not realize what the life would be without a kind loving Ma Brown to protect one from hardships.

Presently a whole bevy of small, brown, gayly dressed Japanese acrobats came whirling into the

ring. Some of them began to balance themselves on poles. Two or three commenced to juggle with plates and rings; one man threw a sharp knife in the air and caught it in his teeth, while still others walked tight ropes backward, balancing with bright umbrellas. So many bewildering acts were performed all at once that Addy complained she couldn't see anything—there was so much to see.

“The Japs have a good time anyway, don't they, grandma?” asked Ab, after watching their skilful feats for some time.

“I can't tell nothin' about them folks,” said Ma Brown, laughing. “They don't seem to me like human bein's, somehow. Anyway, they're heathen. But I s'pose they have hearts like other folks, and I expect sometimes they want to see their kin in their own country.”

“Look at that baby on top of the pole,” cried Addy.

“Yes, pore little tad,” said Ma Brown. “He can't be mor'n six years old. But I guess that's his pa balancin' the pole on his chin. He won't let his baby fall.” Just then Maginnis, who was

walking in the track outside the rings, saw Ma Brown and waved his hand to her, and presently came into her box and sat down by Addy.

“Well, well!” he exclaimed. “Here’s Americiky for ye! One minit actors in a show, and the next sittin’ in a box like queens at a play.”

“Yes, isn’t it nice here?” said Ab. “I never sat in a box at a circus before. We can see the acting so much better than on the seats. We are so near, you know.”

“How do ye like our Japs?” asked Maginnis, as Ab began again to watch the little people in the ring.

“Oh, I think they’re wonderful,” cried Addy.

“Right ye are,” said Maginnis heartily. “They’re the only ones I ever look at. They’re the best performers on earth. And it’s no wonder! In the first place every mother’s son of ’em is cliver to his finger tips, and the acrobats and jugglers don’t know any other life. Their calling is handed down from father to son and they begin teachin’ the babies their tricks as soon as they can walk.”

“Do they get homesick in this country?” asked Addy.

“ ’Deed they do, me girl,” said Maginnis. “No people love home more than they do, and Japan to them is paradise. They call us barbarians, and turn up their noses at our doin’s and our manners.”

“Then what makes so many of them come to our country?” asked the little girl.

“They’re after our money, me child, and they git a heap of it in the summer, and they mostly skip home to spend it in the winter.”

While he was talking the Japanese vanished like a flight of bright birds, and twenty or more clowns seemed to spring from the ground, capering about and performing all sorts of antics to entertain the audience while the three rings were being prepared for some famous equestrians.

The audience seemed to enjoy the clowns greatly, and so did Ab and Addy, who joined in the roars of laughter and clapping of hands as the rollicking fellows, in all sorts of fantastic costumes raced about, playing tricks on each other and doing funny stunts generally. After a while the attention of the children was called to a small vehicle, which was just passing their box. It was

shaped like an old shoe, with holes in its sides and toe, through which various small arms and legs were sticking. Five or six boys dressed like little children were crowded close together in the shoe, their heads just showing, while in their midst stood a clown in a ruffled nightcap and calico wrapper, pretending to whip the children with a big stick. A placard fastened on the back of the shoe had this legend in big letters: "The old woman that lived in a shoe. She had so many children she didn't know what to do."

Ab thought it was the funniest thing she had ever seen. It looked so exactly like the picture in her "Mother Goose" nursery book. She laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, and when it had passed by them, Maginnis asked: "Do ye mind who that Mother Goose is, my dear?"

"No, I'm sure I never saw her before," said Ab—wiping her eyes. "Who is she?"

"He's a little chap that never says nothin' to nobody. He looks like a parson when he isn't workin' and he's always readin' his books between times. But he's a good clown all right, and he's always thinkin' up cliver stunts."

The clowns melted away as the Japanese had done, all of them seeming to disappear at once, when the big brass bands began to play some crashing music, and several beautiful horses dashed into the rings and began to run around them. Almost at the same time men and women riders appeared dressed in the usual tights and gauzy skirts. They bowed smilingly to the audience and then began the riding—dear to every child's heart. There is probably nothing on the circus programs which pleases children so much and of which they never tire. Ab and Addy were no exceptions to this rule. They sat fascinated and entranced while the fairy-like women riders jumped through paper covered hoops or whirled in dances on the backs of the rushing horses, and the equally graceful men riders turned somersaults and vaulted over poles, keeping time with a rhythmic motion to the hoof beats.

“That suits ye best, don't it?” asked Ma Brown, smiling at the children when the riding was over, and the riders were walking slowly away with long cloaks over their shoulders.

“Yes,” said Ab, with a long sigh. “I wish I could ride like that. Do you think I could learn

to do it, Mr. Maginnis, if I practised a great deal?"

"And so ye'd like to be a circus performer," said the little Irishman, stroking Ab's head. "Well, ye're not the only one that is carried away by it. But, me child, ye don't know nothin' about it. It's a terrible long job to learn to ride. It takes years of hard work. By the time ye'd mastered it there wouldn't be anny fun left in it fur ye. Ye see, it's not like cross country ridin' Haloo boys! and som'thin' new each time. Circus ridin's hard work and that tiresome, doin' the same thing over and over."

"Well, isn't there something else I could do?" asked the persistent Ab. "Something that wouldn't take so much time to learn?"

"What would ye be afther wantin' to do?" asked Maginnis.

"I'd like to be a clown," said Ab promptly.

"Well," said the little man, looking at the child critically. "Perhaps ye cud do clownin' and perhaps ye couldn't—it's somethin' ye can't learn. Ye've got to be born to that job."

"Do you think I was born for it?" said Ab anxiously.

“Ye’ve got the make up for it, wid yer hair and eyes, but have ye the inborn sinse of drollery for a first-class clown? I’ve me doubts,” said Maginnis thoughtfully. “Still ye niver can tell till ye thry, so if Mistress Brown’s willin’, I’ll fix both of ye’s a little turn for tomorrow to see what ye’s can do.”

“Oh, please don’t ask me to be in it,” said Addy, almost crying. “I’m sure I couldn’t do it—I would be so scared.”

“Now, Maginnis,” said Ma Brown, “you know these children ain’t real circus folks, and if they was, clownin’ ain’t a girl’s stunt. It wouldn’t be nice for them nohow.”

“Right ye are, ma’am,” said Maginnis, rising to go. “I quite agree wid ye. But ye see, you and I are old fashioned, we’re back numbers. In these days girls and women do what boys and men do ye know.”

He slipped away before she could reply, and as Puck was getting restless, and disturbing other people, Ma Brown proposed that they should go home now, and come another day to see the trapeze performers and the chariot racing.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MASCOT

ONE beautiful Sunday morning Ma Brown was sitting in the shadow of her car with Jennie Lind and her brood on the grass beside her; while the two children not far away seated at a round table, were writing home letters which Nick had promised to post for them.

Ma Brown usually went to church on Sundays, but this morning she was not very well, and thought quiet and fresh air would be the best cure for her. The Sunday quiet was in great contrast to the noise and tumult of weekdays. It was very still and peaceful all about, although the circus tents were very near the trains. Well dressed men, singly or in groups, sat or lay on the grass in the shade reading or writing; and girls and women flitted from one dressing tent to another, most of them in fresh summer gowns and pretty hats. Even stable boys and teamsters strolled about in new clothes, often with bright red or blue neckties and polished shoes.

Ma Brown had just finished giving some directions to Cindy about the care of Scroggins, when glancing toward the encampment she exclaimed, "Well, I declare! There come the Silver Twins."

"Who are they?" asked Ab, looking up.

"Why, don't you know? That's what they call Nannie and Nattie Kirk. They're twins and always dress in white or light gray. Nattie's got on a new suit—that's the third this season! Children, come here quick; I want to tell ye somethin' before they get here."

The little girls carried their pencils in their hands as they walked to her side, and she said hastily:

"Now, you must smile at Nattie when he looks at you. You needn't say anything, just smile. I hain't got time to say any more now, I'll tell ye all about him when they go away."

The young couple were now within speaking distance, but the children could hardly recognize Nannie, she looked so stylish and handsome in a white duck skirt and jacket and a becoming little sailor hat on her red-gold fluffy hair. She held a white parasol in one hand and in the other carried a red prayer book. The only other bits of color

about her were a pale blue necktie, which matched the ribbon ties of her neat white shoes.

Ab and Addy had never seen Nannie's brother before, for he had been ill and confined to his berth since they had been with the circus, and this was the first time he had been out of doors for more than a week. The children thought as the twins came nearer, they had never seen two persons who looked so much alike, although the brother was the handsomer because he had no tan or freckles like his sister. They were dressed as nearly alike as possible in every detail, his short hair and his trousers seeming to be the only points of difference.

"How are you, you old duck!" cried Nannie, bounding forward and kissing Ma Brown's weatherbeaten cheek resoundingly, and patting her back with her prayer book. "Ain't it good to have Nat out again," she continued, as the young man bent and kissed the old lady.

"Yes, it is; and don't he look good enough to eat?" replied Ma Brown, looking up into the young man's face and returning his happy laugh.

"Set down, won't ye?" she went on, motioning to the little girls to bring chairs for the visitors.

"No, we can't stop," said Nannie, "we're on our way to church. Besides Nat don't like to set down more'n he has to, it spoils the creases in his new pants."

The young man was watching Addy and Ab as she made this remark, and now turned to her with an inquiring look.

"Ma Brown's kids," said Nannie with her lips, but with no sound coming from them.

"Don't forget to smile," warned Ma Brown, as the young man walked toward the children.

They would have felt inclined to do this without her reminder, for the broad shouldered, handsome young fellow looked down on them, as he shook hands, with the expression of a sweet, clean baby just grasping a new toy.

"What extravagant children you be," said Ma Brown, looking at Nannie's new dress and hat. "You both look awful cute, but I don't see how you can afford so many new clothes."

"We can't," Nannie answered rather anxiously, as she perched on the arm of her old friend's chair, "but I just can't bear to deny Nattie anything he wants. New clothes are his delight, and he can't bear to wear any but the best. He wants

me to look nice, too, so I buy more than I ought to."

"Ain't ye savin' somethin'?" asked Ma Brown.

"Oh, yes, of course, Nat and I send home a hundred dollars every month, during the season; but that don't go far toward sendin' my sister to a school and puttin' by a little for a rainy day. You know we don't earn anything in the winter."

"Well, ye do pretty well," said Ma Brown encouragingly; "I wouldn't worry. Your sister will be takin' care of herself before long and you and Nattie can always make a livin'."

"I wouldn't mind so much," said Nannie, "if I could depend on Nattie's health. But he's down so often; I'm afraid every day they'll drop him out."

"That's the last thing ye need to worry about," said Ma Brown emphatically. "This circus couldn't git along without Nattie. But I'd think you'd hate to have him so far away from you when he's sick. I wonder if we couldn't fix him up a berth in my car so you could see him every day when he's not able to git out!"

"Why, don't you know the boys take better care of him than I could," cried the sister. "Some

of 'em watch him every minute, night and day. They take turns settin' up with him when he's the least bit sick, and get him everything on earth he wants to eat. They'd spoil him if he *could* be spoiled."

"Ain't that good!" exclaimed Ma Brown, in a tone of deep satisfaction. "I expect he's better off here than he would be to home, livin' so much as he does in the open air."

"Yes, that's so," said Nannie, "and everybody's so good to him, it makes him very happy, and Doc Kelly looks him over every day; we couldn't afford such a good doctor at home."

"Teddy Kelly's the best boy I know," exclaimed Ma Brown. "He's got a heart as big's an ox."

"He's sure good to us, anyway," said Nannie; "I don't know what I'd done if he hadn't doctored my throat last week." .

"There's lots of nice folks in our show," said Ma Brown, warmly. "I believe everybody's good if ye can only get at 'em. Now there's Miss Damyloo—do you know her at all, Nannie?"

"Naw," answered the girl, emphatically, "course not. You don't suppose she'd touch me with a ten foot pole, do you?"

"Now, there's where ye're mistaken, honey. She ain't a bit stuck up. You'd ought to see her visitin' with me and the kids. She comes over every day to play with the chicks, and she talks to Ab and Addy like they was her little sisters, and yet you knows they's poor orphans and came here all ragged and dirty; but she just loves 'em."

"Well, she never seems to see anybody when she meets 'em," said Nannie; "she looks right through you as though you wasn't there."

"I don't suppose she does see ye, any more'n you see the canvas men and the teamsters when ye meet 'em. You don't speak to them, do ye?"

"But that's different," began Nannie, looking as though a new idea had struck her.

"Not a bit different, dearie. They's human bein's like all the rest of us, but you don't sense that when ye see 'em 'cause you don't think about 'em or care for 'em, and that's the way with Miss Damyloo, I expect; you'd act pretty much the same way if you was in France and felt strange to everybody."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Nannie in a mollified tone. "But ye see I'm feelin' kinder

sore over a snubbin' I got the other day from that bunch of English trapeze girls. There was five of 'em sittin' with two Rooshian bareback riders on the grass. They looked so cozy with their embroidery and books, and one of 'em makin' tea in a big brass teapot, that I thought I'd scrape acquaintance; Nattie was sick and I felt sort of lonesome, so I thought it ud be kinder nice to get to know some girls about my own age."

"Course, that's only natural," said Ma Brown, sympathizingly.

"I went up to 'em and introduced myself the jolliest way I knew how," went on Nannie, "and you'd ought to see the way they froze up. They didn't speak except to answer my questions, and then they didn't look at me, and they never asked me to set down. I left 'em pretty quick and tried to find somethin' hard to knock my head on for makin' such a fool of myself."

"Poor silly girls!" said Ma Brown; "you shouldn't get mad at 'em, they don't know any better. As like's not somebody's turned their nose up at 'em, and so they try to get even by doin' the same to you."

"I know what's the matter of 'em," said Nan-

nie, rising and drawing on her white gloves. "They look down on me 'cause I do turns in the concert, but I don't care! I'm as good as they be any day!"

Nattie was busy tossing a ball back and forth with Ab and Addy, and shook his head when his sister touched his arm and pointed toward the town. "He's bewitched with your kids," said Nannie laughing. "I don't know how I'm going to get him away. He's so tickled when he finds nice clean children. Doc Kelly says, you know, that his mind is really only about ten years old."

"Why don't you let him stay with us this mornin'? Wouldn't it do him as much good as goin' to church when he can't hear nothin'?"

"I promised my mother I'd take him to church every Sunday that he was well enough to go," said Nannie. "This morning is so pleasant we ought not to miss it."

"Yes, I see; well, you tell him I've got to send the girls on an érrand, and he'll be satisfied. Addy you and Ab run over to Miss Damylloo and ask her for that picture paper she promised to let ye have. Shake hands with Nattie and smile at him good, and then run along."

The children obeyed, and the brother and sister walked away, the young man looking rather longingly at his disappearing little playfellows. When they came back in a few moments they were very eager to hear more about Nannie's brother who seemed such a child and yet looked in size and dress so impressively grown up.

"Why didn't he talk, grandma?" asked Ab. "He never said a word, and when he laughed he made such a funny noise."

"Why, Nattie's deaf and dumb, honey, didn't you know that? He had scarlet fever when he was a baby, and he's never heard a sound since then. He couldn't learn to talk, and he can't talk with his hands, like some deaf mutes does. But he understands Nannie by watchin' her lips, and he gets along first rate. They're together every minute when they're not asleep, or sick."

"Does he sing with Nannie in the concert?" asked Addy.

"Land no; he can't do nothin' but dance. He loves to do that, and he knows all kinds of steps, and sometimes he makes a first rate hit at the concert. But you can't depend on him. He's such a child he won't dance unless he feels like

it; and then he's very delicate. He's not able to do anything a good deal of the time."

"I wouldn't think Mr. Bellman would keep him," said Ab.

"Oh, Hank thinks he earns a good salary just by keepin' the men straight."

"How?" asked Ab.

"Well, the performers and all the hands round the show has taken a wonderful notion to him. They call him their 'mascot' and some of 'em would leave the circus if he did."

"What's a 'mascot'?" asked Addy.

"It's somethin' they think brings good luck. Men folks is awful childish about some things. I've heard that college boys, men grown, take round with 'em a little bulldog, or sometimes a small darkey when they play football games, and they think they can't beat unless their mascot is with 'em. I believe it's because everybody wants somethin' to pet, and these poor lonesome circus men think a sight of Nattie, 'cause he's so sweet and innocent and trustin'. It's next best to havin' a home and children. He thinks they're all his friends, and that makes 'em want to be good to him."

“But how does he keep the men straight?”

“Why, ye see Nattie’s peculiar. He can’t bear dirt, or bad smells, or cross looks. If folks is clean and looks pleasant, he likes ’em and wants to be with ’em, from the stable boys up to the managers. It don’t make no difference who it is. So don’t you see, everybody round him has to be good natured and keep clean. He runs away from surly folks, and as he goes about the grounds all the time, the men have to put on a pleasant look and smile when they see him a-comin’. Ye can’t be mad and smile at the same time. It’s queer, but that’s really so; you try it sometime.”

“Is that why you told us to smile at him?” asked Addy.

“Of course; I wanted him to like ye fust rate, and I guess he does all right. Hank says since Nattie came the men ain’t half so apt to snarl and curse as they was before, and they don’t smoke in the sleepin’ cars no more, because Nattie don’t like the smell of stale tobacco; and there ain’t half so much drinkin’ either, for Nattie can’t endure the smell o’ liquor.”

The little girls were very much interested and wanted to hear more about the mascot, but Ma

Brown's attention was called away by seeing a party of smartly dressed young men coming toward her. They wore silk hats and carried canes, and looked, the children thought, very much like the fashion plate figures one sees in shop windows.

"Who are they?" asked Ab.

"Them's clowns. They're great cronies, and always go round together. They call themselves the 'big six.' "

"Why, I thought they were gentlemen," said Ab, "and I wondered how they came here."

"They be gentlemen, honey, and two of 'em's college graduates."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CLOWNS

THE young men clustered about her to shake hands, and one of them laid a bunch of pink roses in her lap.

“You’re awful good to give me these, Jimmie,” she said, burying her face in the soft petals. “You know how I love flowers, don’t ye? Let me send the little girls for some chairs,” she went on. “I’d love to have ye make me a visit.”

“No, we’re off to church in a bunch,” said the one she had called Jimmie. “We stopped a moment to see how you and Jennie Lind are this morning.”

“Oh, we’re doin’ fine. The chicks is growin’ like weeds; I’ll have to get another cage for ’em pretty quick.”

“This is a nice morning for ’em to be runnin’ about,” remarked one of the young men as he watched the chirping little birds in the wake of their nervous mother.

“Yes, so it is; and it’s a nice day for church,

too," said Ma Brown. "Most every one's goin' this mornin'; Nattie and Nannie Kirk went by a few minutes ago."

"Nat's out, is he?" said Jimmie. "I'm glad to hear it. The boys were getting anxious about him."

"That sister of his ought to be doin' something better than turns in the concert. She has a rip-pin' voice, and she can act, too," said one of the young men, with an English accent.

"It's the only thing she can do and keep her brother with her," said Ma Brown. "They're never apart except when they're sleepin'. She's an awful good girl, and her chance'll come yet. She's young, only eighteen, and she can afford to wait."

"Nancy's a brick," said Jimmie, emphatically.

"Where's Tommy?" asked Ma Brown, noticing there were only five of the "big six" present.

"The 'Infant Phenomenon' is so busy thinking up a new stunt he wouldn't go to church with us this morning."

"Why, what's the matter of his cute little pig? I should think he wouldn't need a new turn the hull season."

“Pickwick’s gone back on Tommy,” said the young man. “He’s grown as obstinate as only a pig knows how to be. He lies down and squeals when Tom tries to drive him in the ring. Doc Reeves thinks he has rheumatism in his hind legs.”

“That’s too bad,” said Ma Brown sympathizingly. “Tommy did look so cunnin’ dressed up like a little boy with them fat cheeks puffin’ out as he chased his little pig. But he’s so smart, he’ll think of another stunt pretty soon, I expect.”

“No doubt of that,” said Jimmie. “If any one gets hold of a bright new idea it’s sure to be the Infant.”

“Well, ye’re all smart boys. I never git tired of seein’ ye cuttin’ up yer didos,” said Ma Brown, as they shook hands again at parting.

“Are those *really* the clowns we see in the ring?” asked Addy, incredulously, after they were gone.

“The very same, dearie. One of ’em’s the old woman in a Mother Hubbard wrapper and ruffled cap. That tall feller, that’s so thin, ye know, Jakey Schuyler, well he’s the fat man. When he waddles round the ring he’s almost as broad as

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he's long; I don't see how he can carry so much paddin'. It must be awful heavy."

"I think it must be fun to be a clown," said Ab. "They don't get much money for it, do they? It seems so easy, anybody could be one."

"Ye're awful mistaken, honey. There's the biggest kind o' pay for clownin', that is, if yer first class. But it's hard work. Our clowns is expected to think up new stunts all the time, and if they don't make a big laugh in the audience, they're dropped out after a while."

"How many clowns are there in the circus?" asked Addy.

"We had thirty when we began the season, but five of 'em was dismissed. They was nice fellers, but they wasn't smart enough to think of new stunts, and Hank says he won't have any warmed over ones. He likes college boys the best. They generally have a lot of trainin' in gymnasiums while they're in school, so they can do pretty good turns as acrobats while the performers is restin', and then they've got brains. It takes a smart person to be real funny."

"Who is Tommy?" asked Addy.

"Tommy? Oh, he's the cutest little feller in

the hull bunch. You'd never think to look at him that he's so smart. His father's a college professor. Tommy wrote a little book of poems while he was in college. He gave me a copy. It's awful nice, I expect, tho' I can't understand much of it. Hank says he's goin' to make a first class clown—and that makes me think: the last time I seen him he was limpin' round with a bad corn. I must hunt him up this mornin' and give him a corn plaster that helped me a lot."

"Can't I get it?" asked Addy, when she found it was not in her bag.

"Yes, honey, you run in and look in the upper drawer of my bureau; you'll find a little round box in the left hand corner."

While she was gone Ma Brown rose creakingly from her chair, threw a knit shawl over her shoulders, and when Addy returned was ready to walk off in search of the promising Tommy, Ab and Addy on either side of her.

They found him before long, lying on his back in the shade of a big wagon, looking up into the blue sky. He did not notice them at first, but when Ma Brown spoke to him, he jumped up, grasped her hand cordially and ran for a soap box

which happened to stand near, and begged her to be seated.

“I’m sorry I’ve no chair, but this will be better than nothing,” he said, as he pushed her gently on to the seat. “The grass is good enough for you and me, kids,” he continued, motioning to the children to join him as he sat cross-legged like a little Turk at Ma Brown’s feet.

They curled up beside him, and while he and Ma Brown were exchanging experiences in regard to especially aggravating and disabling corns, the little girls had a good opportunity to satisfy their curiosity as they watched the young man sitting beside them, and they agreed with Ma Brown that if he was unusually clever his looks did not betray that fact. He was dressed in white flannels which fitted rather too snugly his short plump figure. His face was round and red, and his little gray eyes peeped out under a fringe of sunburnt yellow hair which almost covered his forehead.

Ma Brown finally gave him the box of corn plasters, telling him how to use them, and then said, pointing to a book lying on the grass: “What you readin’, Tommy?”

The young man reached for the book and handed

it to her. She put on her spectacles and read on the title page, "The Ascent of Man," and remarked: "I suppose that's for the trapeze performers, ain't it? I shouldn't think it would do you no good, you don't do nothin' but tumble, do ye?"

Tommy's eyes twinkled, but he did not laugh as he said, "Oh, that's one of the new books my mother sent me, but I've hardly looked at it. I can't read today."

"Jimmie told me you was tryin' to think out a new stunt. It's too bad yer little pig acts so naughty," said Ma Brown sympathizingly.

"Pickwick's on a strike. I don't blame the little porker, I expect he's tired of having his hind leg yanked. I'm going to send him to my little sister for a vacation. He'll come back all right when he's had a rest."

"Have ye thought of a new turn yet?"

"Not a thing. I seem to be perfectly addled this morning, when I need brains if I ever did."

"Perhaps I can git ye started on a notion," said Ma Brown, smiling.

"I wish to goodness you could," said the young

man, looking wistfully up into her face. "What is your notion?"

"Well, I don't s'pose ye could do nothin' with it, but I jest happened to think of a talk I had with Maginnis the other day. I was telling him how my brother Henny was tryin' to dress himself once when he was about four years old. He got his little panties on hind side before and my old aunt laughed at him and said nobody could tell whether he was goin' to school or comin' home. Maginnis said if Tommy Benton ever needed a new idea he'd make somethin' out of that. So I thought I'd tell ye."

"Ma Brown, that's bully!" cried Tommy, springing to his feet and running his fat white fingers through his shock of hair. "I can see in an instant that's tiptop; nothing could be better! You see I'm made for a fat little school boy, and I can walk backward like a crab. The tailor can fix me up with clothes all buttoned up behind. I'll get one of the fellows to dress up for my mother. She'll drag me grumbling to school with my books and dinner pail. When she drops my hand to pick up her umbrella I'll scuttle backward, turning my head to one side. Oh, it's a dandy idea,

and I can't thank you enough for it. But don't tell the other fellows—will you?"

"No, I won't say a word," she replied much pleased as she arose to go. "I'm awful glad ye can make somethin' with the idea. Now you go to work and think it out—I know it'll be real funny."

CHAPTER XX

A TALK WITH DAMILEAU

“**M**ISS DAMILEAU asked us to go to see her this morning,” said Ab, as they walked away.

“Did she, honey? Well, I guess there’s time to make a short call before dinner,” said Ma Brown, as they turned in the direction of the trains. But before they reached them they met the French artiste who seemed much excited, and hastened to say that she was looking for Ma Brown; she had something important to tell her.

“Run and hang Scroggins’ cage outside,” said Ma Brown to the little girls, and then when they were beyond hearing turned inquiringly to the young woman at her side, who said at once: “You were going to your rooms, let us talk as we walk there. I am sorry to trouble you, dear madame, but to whom shall I turn for advice if not to you?”

“Of course,” said Ma Brown, patting the slim

hand that rested on her arm as they walked. "I'll be right glad to help ye all I can. What is it?"

"My maid is very much afraid of the strange, dark young man who comes often to your car. I do not know his real name. The circus people call him 'Imp.' Adele is sure he is *le diable*, and told me one day she had seen two short horns under his cap. She is in such terror of him that she goes not out at all, and thinks always to see him."

"Poor Henny," said Ma Brown, "that's what comes from gettin' a bad name."

"But, dear madame, there is more," said Damileau shuddering. "I have scolded Adele many times for her silliness, but today I have seen with my own eyes—oh, something quite terrible."

"Do tell! What can it be?" cried Ma Brown looking now really anxious.

"Adele saw this creature from our window," went on the French woman hurriedly, "and I too looked. We saw him running in and out among the cars, so quick, so still, so strange, not like a human being. He had, what you call a sack in his hand. Some little children of the Italian acrobats were playing there. In one moment he had one of these babies in this sack, had thrown it over his

shoulder, and was gone. We could not tell where. But we saw the struggles of the little one through the cloth and heard its sad cry." The overwrought artiste was weeping and shivering as she finished her alarming story.

Ma Brown looked mystified, but she said at once. "I can't think what Henny was up to, but I just know there must be some mistake, he never would steal no babies."

"But I cannot doubt my eyes, dear madame," protested Damileau.

"Oh, *I* know what 'twas," cried Ma Brown, in a greatly relieved tone, "and 'tain't a bit what ye think it is. You'll be right sorry ye misjudged poor Henny when I tell ye."

They were before the door of her car now, and leading the agitated young woman into her sitting room she seated her on the broad lounge and handed her a cup of iced tea which always stood ready for use in a tiny ice chest. "There, honey," she said, "drink that. It's better fer yer nerves than wine, and I'll tell ye somethin' about poor Henny that'll make ye cry *fer* him."

Her visitor held her cup in a shaking hand and with her black, wide opened eyes fixed on the kind

face before her, waited silently for her next words.

“You know Nannie Kirk’s twin brother, don’t ye?” asked Ma Brown.

“No, Madame.”

“You don’t? Why, I thought everybody knew poor Nattie.”

“I am a stranger in your country, Madame. I do not know the people of the circus.”

“That’s a pity. There’s lots of nice folks here; you wouldn’t be so lonesome if you knew some of ’em. But I must tell ye about Nattie. He’s a deaf and dumb boy that dances while his sister sings in the concerts. She supports him and does everything for him. The men think all the world of him, and if he didn’t go along with the show they believe something dreadful would happen.”

“Yes, yes, I understand, an innocent! Go on,” broke in Damileau, leaning forward.

“That’s a good name for Nattie. He is innocent and good like a little child. Well, he likes Henny first rate, and Henny just worships him, and wants to do everything he can for him. Nattie’s as ’fraid as death of cats. He faints if one comes near. So every spare minute Henny has he

spends it lookin' for stray cats. He catches two or three of 'em every day and carries 'em off. That's what ye seen in his bag."

"Ah, Madame, how cruel have I been," cried Damileau, setting down her cup of tea which she had not tasted. "I am the fiend, and that poor young man is an angel."

"No, he ain't," Ma Brown hastened to say. "Henny's got an awful bad side to him. He's sly and he lies and cheats, but he ain't to blame. He's never had no trainin', or anybody to love him and be good to him, I guess, till he came here. But he's got a kind heart. He brought our little girls to us when they was awful bad off, so we could take care of 'em, and there ain't nothin' he won't do for Nattie and me just because we treat him like a human bein'."

"What can I do to atone for my injustice?" said Damileau, humbly as she wiped her eyes.

"Why, you hain't done nothin' so dretful. It was natural enough for you to think of him as ye did. But now that you know about him, if you'd only just speak to him when ye meet him, why they ain't no tellin' what it would do for him."

"Oh, Madame, that is too little. Surely I may

at least tell him how beautiful to me is his devotion to the poor innocent."

"No, I'd advise ye not to do that. You'd scare the boy. He wouldn't know what ye was talkin' about," Ma Brown hastened to say.

"How selfish and narrow is my life," said Damileau, looking down sadly at her folded hands. "I know only my small world; I can do no good to any one outside it."

"Yes, ye can, honey," said Ma Brown, cheerily, taking a seat by the younger woman's side. "You'd be surprised to find how easy it is to make yerself happy as well as every one round ye."

"I do not understand, Madame, but I wish your words were true."

"Well, you just try bowin' and smilin' at circus folks when ye meet 'em. Everybody thinks you're stuck up because you never look at 'em or go near 'em."

"Stuck up?" repeated the French woman, inquiringly.

"Yes, they say you think you're better than they be."

"Oh, I see! But that is—what you call it?—reedikulous. Why, we are all the same, we circus

artistes. No one can be above another; we work and earn our living in our different ways. Why should one of us be what you call 'stuck up?' "

"Well, the high up ones, them they calls 'stars,' generally lords it over the others, and then you ain't like most circus performers, anyway. I guess you've had a better chance at schoolin' and learnin' pretty manners, and you speak our language like a book."

"Ah, Madame, there is a good reason for all that," cried Damileau. "Let me tell you. My father was a teacher in a riding school for professionals. He began to train me to ride when I was very young, but I had time to go to the public school, and when I was ten my dear Aunt Julie sent me to a convent for one year. There the good Sisters taught me music and embroidery and what you call 'pretty manners.' Then my father had an engagement to teach in London for two years. He took me with him and there my professional training went on under him, and he was able to provide me with good masters so that my education was not neglected though I could not go to school. You see when we went home to France I had naturally a knowledge of English."

Ma Brown had listened intently and now said cordially: "I see, I understand all about it, and there ain't no good reason for callin' ye 'stuck up.' But there's lots of folks that's that way. Now you show 'em you ain't that kind."

"You shall see what I will do, dear Maman Brown," cried the impulsive French girl clasping the dumpy little figure in her arms, kissing her on both cheeks and then running away to scold Adele again for her silliness.

CHAPTER XXI

A TALK WITH MAGINNIS

AFTER the parade one morning the children found Ma Brown with Jennie Lind settled for the day under a red and white striped awning stretched back of the woman's side of the dressing tent. This arrangement was often made for her when the trains were a long distance from the tents, and the weather warm enough to make the day out of doors a pleasant one.

The sisters found her looking very cozy and much at home swaying gently back and forth in a little rocker placed on a large rug.

There were camp chairs, stools, and cushions scattered about which were soon occupied by callers. After the parade the performers had the time to themselves until the dinner hour, and many of them always came straight to Ma Brown for a chat whenever she was within reach.

Tommy Benton was one of her first visitors. He was very warm and thirsty, and drank two glasses of the cold lemonade his hostess had ready

in a big punch bowl on a table at her side, and all her guests were told to help themselves.

“How’s yer little trick workin’ out?” Ma Brown asked, when he had thrown himself on the grass near her.

“Fine! The boys are all green with envy, for it’s the best thing out. The crowds catch on in a minute. But it’s a hot job for fat little Tommy to keep it up in the parade on a day like this.”

“It’s a good new turn, ma’am, and Benton’s the man for it,” said Maginnis, who in his shirt sleeves, was sitting on a stool smoking a pipe.

“Mr. Maginnis, were you always with the circus?” asked Ab, settling down on the grass by the side of the genial Irishman.

“Do ye mane was I born under the ‘big top’ or in the menagerie tent? No, me dearie, I was a full grown man in the ould counthry before I knew there was such an insthitution as a big American circus.”

“Tell us how you got into it,” said Addy, curling up by Ab’s side.

“You’s do be the young uns for askin’ questions. I’m like an orange sucked dhry whin ye git thro’ wid me.”

Maginnis' face wrinkled whimsically, but the children knew he liked to talk as well as they enjoyed listening, so to get him fairly started Ab asked: "Did you belong to a circus in Ireland?"

"Not much, me child. Me family hold themselves quite above strollin' jugglers and the loike. Me father had a dacent shop in Dublin, and I was set to mind it when I was out o' school. But it was a dull life for the loike o' me. I ran away to London when I was seventeen to thry me fortune."

"Did you like it there?"

"I had me ups and downs. A big city's no place for a homeless lad. Some days I went hungry to bed. But that's nayther here nor there, I got along as well as most of the rollin' stones. I had a pretty good job as 'make-up man' in a thayater, whin I chanst to read in a big London paper a long article, an editorial it was, ye understand, not an advertisement, all about what a wonderful thing the American Circus was that had crossed the ocean and was showin' in England."

"Why, I didn't know an American Circus ever traveled in England. How could they get over there?" queried Addy.

“That’s what the people asked in the ould counthry, and they never got over wonderin’. This piece in the paper I was tellin’ ye about was written by a preacher, high up in the Church of England. He called the government to take notice of the cliver way the circus was managed. He tould the War Department they’d better send officers to the show to learn how to move heavy material, put up big tents in a hurry, and carry the whole business on the railway and in ships. He said they’d git some new ideas which they needed.”

“Did they send the officers?” asked Addy.

“That they did. Two or more of ’em from the regular army was with the show every day, takin’ notes; and when the circus crossed over to the continent, who but the Emperor Francis Joseph himself came to the performance in Vienna, and stayed to see them pull down the tents and load the trains. Every newspaper in Europe was talkin’ of the wonderful Yankee cliverness showin’ in the organization and discipline of the Circus, and all said ’twas much better than anny thing in their armies.”

“But you haven’t told us how you happened to

go with them," said Ab, as Maginnis paused to knock the ashes from his pipe.

"All in good time, dear, every story has its preface, ye know. Whin I read the piece in the *London Times* I said 'that's the bisness for Terence Maginnis!' I'd always wanted to be in the army, ye mind, and this seemed the next thing to it. If I cud wance git inside, I knew I'd be able to make my way, and then I'd have a chance to go to Ameriky. I'd long wanted to come to this counthry to see me relations, I'd uncles and aunts and cousins a plenty over here. So I goes to the head man wid all me cheek wid me, and ye know ould Maginnis has plenty o' that same. I tould him what I cud do. He looked me over from head to foot. He wasted no words, ye mind, but put me thin and there to makin' up a clown. I did me best, and be jabers, if he didn't hire me on the spot! Ye see, luck was on me side for onct, for one of thim 'make-up' men had just left 'em. I staid wid 'em till they toured in England, Germany and France, and then I came back to this counthry wid 'em, and here I am. It's manny a year I've traveled wid this show. Once ye git

the circus microbe in yer blood there's no gittin' it out. It sticks."

"Do all the circus people stay with it a long time?" asked Ab.

"They do that, and there's a good reason for it. They are treated right, and well paid, and they git to feelin' at home. They're mostly a good sort and hang together like a big family, all jealous of the good name of the Circus."

"You didn't stay a 'make-up' man did you?" said Addy.

"Ye can't hide a spark of geneus," said Maginnis, chuckling. "Mine shone so bright the managers was forced to take notice. They found I cud do better than makin' faces and the loike, and before long they set me to inventin' acts and tableaux, for the ring and for the parade. It's a foine job, but it keeps old Maginnis workin' pretty hard."

The little man filled his pipe, lighted it and began smoking. After a moment's silence Addy asked, "Do you go back to London and Dublin in the winter when the circus doesn't travel?"

"No sich good luck for me! I'm a hard workin'

drudge and winter's me busiest time. I've no chance thin to be sittin' round in ladies' bowers and answerin' questions of kids like you."

"Why, I thought everybody went home in the winter. Nannie Kirk does!" exclaimed Addy.

"That's thrue of the performers and the workmen. When the show comes back from the South in November, they go where they plaze; most of 'em live in villages or on farms. They like to stay in the quietest places they can find. But it takes more'n workmen and performers to run a circus. There's the owners, managers, contracting agents, press agents, treasurer, book agent, and artists like meself must work every day of the lay off to be ready for the next season. They have headquarters together where they can consult and decide about a lot of things. So they have offices at Winter Quarters, and it's there I have a chance to thry me new ideas in the ring. Then the lions and tigers, the elephants, the bears and the monkeys can't have a vacation. It's too far off from Africa and Austhralia and India for them to go home to visit their kin. Somebody must stay wid 'em and keep 'em warm and clean and well fed. So they're kept there with keepers

and trainers to take care of thim. And sometimes acrobats and jugglers stay in Winter Quarters to practise new tricks in the ring."

"Do they train the performing animals in the winter?" asked Addy.

"That's just the time for doin' it, and a long, hard job it is, to be sure."

"I'd like to see a lion tamed," remarked Ab.

"Ye'd never have that chance if ye lived to be a thousand years old. Wild beasts are never tamed; just remember that, and don't make pets of 'em."

"Why, aren't they tame when the man goes in the cage with them and makes them sit on stools and roll barrels, and lies down with 'em sometimes? I saw a woman trainer once put a lion round her neck and carry him on her shoulders. He seemed to like it."

"All the same, he'd eat her up in a minute if he wasn't afraid of her," said Maginnis. "That's all there is of trainin'. You mustn't be afraid of 'em yourself, and you must make 'em afraid of you."

"Did you ever see any one train a lion or tiger?"

“Wanst I did, and that’s enough for a life time. It’s not a good thing for a body’s nerves.”

“Won’t you tell us how he did it?” said Ab, edging nearer to Maginnis, her eyes shining with interest.

Addy didn’t enjoy hearing about fierce wild beasts, so she ran off with Puck to play hide and seek among the tents, leaving Ab to listen breathlessly to the story of their mastery.

“The circus is gettin’ new wild animals all the time,” began Maginnis. “During the winter they have to be broken so they can be handled on the road. When they come to us they have thick leather collars around their necks, with heavy chains fastened to ’em. The beasts are terribly savage at first, and spit and growl at anny body that comes near their cages, and jump at the bars until they are tired. The tamer I’m tellin’ ye about, began on a full grown young lion the first day he came in. He made three men catch the end of his chain and fasten it to the bars of the cage in such a way that the lion could move only a short distance. Well, me heart was in me throat when little Teddy Masters at last made ready to go in the cage. He was a slim, mild-mannered young

feller, never sayin' much, and to meet him on the street you'd say he was the man to be bossed by his wife and the last one to stand up to a howlin', ragin', roarin' 'king of the desert.' "

Ab laughed and the Irishman went on:

"He had wid him a strong rawhide whip and a big club whin he slipped into the cage and sat down on a chair in the corner. Holy Mother, but I was scared! The beast give a great roar and sprang for him. I shrieked loike a woman, 'Git out o' that, Teddy, he'll eat ye at one mouthful!' But the chain held him back and he fell to the floor. What did the bye do but quick as lightnin' he gave the beast an awful lash with the rawhide.

"The lion was at him again, and again fell and got another lashin', and they kept this up for a long time, Teddy drawin' his chair nearer and nearer until the beast could touch him with his nose, but cudn't bite him. Then the little man just sat there and talked quiet like to the ragin' beast, and, by the powers, if it didn't seem to understand what was said to him, and lay quite still for a minute. 'Whoa there, old fellow! Quiet, now, we aren't going to quarrel. Keep still now.' Thin when the creature got angry and made an-

other spring at him, Teddy gave him the lash again, and so on till he left the cage."

"Is that all?" said Ab, rather disappointed.

"It was, and quite enough for the first time. Ye can't teach a lion everything in one lesson anny more than a child can learn to read in a day. But it was enough for me. Teddy went thro' that round with his lion every day for two weeks, and then he asked me didn't I want to see him go into the cage for the first time to meet the brute without his chain. 'No, thank ye,' says I, 'but I'll be plased to write to yer widow whin it's all over, if ye'll give me her address.' "

"Did the lion kill him?" asked Ab, her big eyes shining.

"Not Teddy. The lion or tiger or panther wasn't livin' that he cuddn't best him. Ye see the brute was at last used to the man comin' in at a certain hour and he'd learned if he wasn't civil he'd get a batin' wid the cruel whip or the big club. He was afraid of Teddy, and he gave up the fight. All animals of the cat family are cowards, and the lion's as bad as anny of them. It's nonsense to call him the 'King of beasts.' Well, the next step was to obey the man as soon as he

learned what was wanted. Teddy began with a simple trick. He held out a stick perhaps a foot from the floor and told the lion to jump over it. You've seen cats and dogs taught that trick, I suppose; it takes patience, but after a while they know what's asked of them and they do it. It wasn't so hard to teach the lion other things then, but the trainer has to know his animal and be able to tell when to stop. Nothin' but fear controls 'em, and if they get angry, as they will if they're tired, they forget their fear, and it's all up with the trainer."

"Does the lion—"

"Not another question today, me child," interrupted Maginnis, raising his hand. "I've talked till I'm as dhry as the desert. Run and bring me a glass of Mistress Brown's cold drink. 'Tis not what ye'd call in the ould counthry the 'comfort-in' drap,' but it's not so bad on a day loike this."

Ab made her way to the lemonade stand among the groups now seated, standing or lying under the wide awning. There was an air of comfort and ease everywhere, for Ma Brown had the gift of making her guests feel at home. The English and Russian trapeze girls were sitting together

on camp stools busy with embroidery and knitting. They were neatly dressed in dark skirts and fresh shirt waists, with shining pompadoured heads bending over their work as they chatted. A young German woman who helped her husband do juggler's feats was talking in broken English to Ma Brown, at the same time keeping an eye on two little children playing with toys at her feet. Half a dozen men were sprawling on the grass just beyond the rug, some of them reading papers and magazines and others hunting for four-leaved clover in the grass, while several of them fed the little chickens crumbs from their pockets.

Ab handed the glass of lemonade to Maginnis, and then was astonished to see all the people about her, except Ma Brown, rise to their feet and look in the same direction. She turned and saw Mademoiselle Damileau coming toward them, and by her side walked Nannie Kirk.

CHAPTER XXII

MA BROWN'S "AT HOME"

“**W**HAT makes everybody stand up?” asked Addy.

“Nobody but the queen may sit in the presence of royalty,” said Maginnis, laughing, as he too rose with the others.

Ab did not understand, but there was no time for further explanation. The French artiste had reached her now, and kissed her affectionately on each cheek as she passed on. No manner could be more simple or free from embarrassment than hers, as she shook Ma Brown's hand and then taking Nannie's arm walked easily about among the circus people, bowing, smiling and shaking hands as though she had known them all her life. As she had never before looked at nor spoken to any of them they were greatly astonished, and hardly knew what to say.

The English girls were particularly abashed, and giggled nervously when she stopped before

them a moment to remark, "I think you know my friend Miss Kirk?—for English and Americans are of one family."

Nannie blushed and looked much embarrassed, but the English girls were now anxious to be friendly with her. Any one introduced by the great Damileau must be "somebody." They pressed forward to shake hands and one of them murmured something about her "jolly singin'," and her "good lookin' brother."

"I shall go to the concert to hear Miss Kirk sing," said Damileau smiling, as they moved away; "and sometime I hope to see the beautiful brother."

Nannie was dumb from shyness. She longed to tell the lovely foreigner by her side that she appreciated her kindness and was very grateful for what seemed to her an immense condescension. In her own humble mind there was a wide space between herself, an insignificant singer in the concert, and the wonderful Damileau at the head of her profession, with a name famous on two continents. Then the refinement, the gentle manners, the soft tones of the artiste belonged to a world of which she knew nothing. Any words

she could think of would sound uncouth and out of place.

If an inhabitant of the planet Mars had appeared and spoken to her she would not have been more astonished than she had been a few moments before when Damileau introduced herself and asked her to visit Ma Brown with her. She was still trembling from the surprise and suddenness of the situation, and felt miserably awkward and ungainly as they reached Ma Brown. Now she placed a chair for the new comer, and found voice enough to say, "Set down and I'll get you some lemonade."

She darted away and Ma Brown said cordially as Damileau sat by her side, "I'm awful glad ye came; ye done jest right to go round and speak to everybody without bein' introduced. Some folks thinks that's necessary, but 'tain't here, where we're all one family."

"I am very happy, dear Madame, to find myself among friends. I had not thought that possible until I should go home to my own country. But you have opened my stupid eyes."

"And you found it awful easy—just as I told ye, didn't ye?" said Ma Brown, flushing with

pleasure. "I jest knowed ye didn't understand how things was, or you'd be havin' a good time. There ain't no reason for you to be homesick or lonesome no more."

"Ah, that is true, Maman Brown. When you showed me my selfishness, I went at once among my countrymen and women and the Italians; you know there are many of them traveling with us. I have but to look about, and put out my hand to find brothers and sisters."

"You've got an awful good heart, honey, and ye don't let grass grow under yer feet, do ye? Now ye want to git acquainted with some of our nice smart folks. You'll like 'em."

"Are you sure they would care to know me, Madame?" asked Damileau rather wistfully, "English speaking people seem to me cold."

"That's because they're bashful. They haven't got your easy way of talkin'. But their hearts is all right. Most of 'em's real kind and good, and you can depend on what any of 'em tells ye."

"I believe that is true, Madame," said the artiste, putting down her empty glass on a tray Nannie passed to her. And then looking about

she remarked, "I do not see Madame Bellman here. Will she not come to you this morning?"

"Loly's gone off shoppin'. She jest loves to go to the stores when she gits a chance, and she says there's some pretty good ones in this town."

"I think most ladies have that taste," said Damileau. "But I do not like shops; I am glad to have everything bought for me, and as Adele is fond of shopping, and buys with good judgment, we are both very well pleased."

"Has your girl got over bein' scared at poor Henny?" asked Ma Brown, smiling at the mention of the French maid.

"Oh, quite, Madame. She wept and prayed to the saints for forgiveness when I told her how we had been mistaken in the young man. She now thinks him an angel, and I have great trouble to keep her from kneeling before him when she sees him. She is continually running after him, and I think the silly girl will not rest until she has told him how sorry she is."

"There!" exclaimed Ma Brown, "that explains why Henny acts so funny lately! He's dretful nervous and he's always lookin' over his shoulder

as though he expected to be robbed. I hope she won't catch him; she'd scare the boy to death, if she did. He's awfully afraid of women and girls."

"Are you talking about the Imp?" asked Tommy Benton, who was near enough to hear this conversation.

"Now, don't you call him that bad name, Tommy," said Ma Brown, shaking her finger at the young man.

"What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," quoted Tommy, as he handed her a small bunch of four-leaved clovers.

She smiled and pinned the leaves on her waist, remarking: "You always have some of yer pretty verses ready, Tommy, don't ye? But I'm afraid 'roses' ain't jest the name for Henny. Do you know where he is? I ain't seen him today, and I wanted to ask him about his earache."

"The boys were talking of sending him to a greenhouse to get some flowers for the mascot. You know this is his birthday. Perhaps he's gone on that errand," said Tommy.

Damileau clasped her hands. "Ah, I envy him," she exclaimed; "this too is my birthday, but who will remember it!"

"Aren't you going to celebrate?" asked Tommy, in a tone of friendly interest.

"How can I do that, with my dear ones so far away?" said the artiste shaking her head sadly. "In my own home, my Aunt Julie always made for me on this day a little fête in the garden. But here there is no time or place for a fête, and who would care for my poor birthday?"

"What's a 'fate?' " asked Ma Brown, in a puzzled whisper.

"French for party," returned Tommy, also under his breath.

"Now look here, honey, why don't we have a birthday party right here for you and Nannie and Nattie?" cried Ma Brown, taking Damileau's hand and squeezing it.

"Ah, that would be beautiful," cried Damileau, her eyes shining as she clasped Ma Brown's hand in both her own. But her tone changed at once as she added: "That cannot be, Madame, a fête is impossible here today."

"No, it ain't, honey, you jest sec," cried Ma Brown cheerfully. "We can fix up a tent or something lovely, can't we Tommy?"

"Sure," said the young man heartily. "That's

a capital idea. The boys will be delighted to have a party for Nat, and we shall all be honored in observing Mademoiselle Damileau's birthday."

Tommy evidently knew what to say if poor Nan-nie did not.

"Ah, you Americans! You will make me disloyal to my own countrymen," cried the artiste, looking very happy.

"'Twon't be so nice, perhaps, as the party in yer aunt's garden, but we'll do the best we can to make ye have a good time," said Ma Brown, rising, as they heard the notes of a bugle calling every one to dinner. "You come back here at half-past five, honey, right after supper, and yer party will be all ready fer ye. Now run along to yer dinner," she concluded, patting the back of the distinguished foreigner, who laughed delightedly as she hurried away.

The young man lingered a moment after the others had gone and Ma Brown said with the air of a general, "Now, Tommy, you'll have to be in the ring and you won't have time to do much, but you can go round the dinner table and ask everybody to the party. I'll tell Hank what we're up

to, and he'll give me Maginnis—me and him will get everything ready."

"All right, I'll do that; and between my turns I can help with the decorations. It's going to be bully fun. Mr. Bellman will give Maginnis *carte blanche*, and he'll do wonders."

One would think it was going to be Tommy's party, he seemed so excited and pleased.

"I don't know what a cart's got to do with it, but of course Hank'll let us have what we want, and I guess it'll be pretty nice," said Ma Brown, stepping into the carriage which stood waiting to take her to a hotel in the city to dine with her daughter.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

AT Maginnis' request, Ma Brown had willingly left everything in his hands, and he had indeed "done wonders" in the few hours at his command. The manager had told him to spare no expense, and had furnished all the competent help he needed, so that with his quick wits and his experience, he had produced a charming background for the impromptu fête.

The harness, blacksmith and barber's tents were taken down and carried to the trains a little sooner than usual, leaving a large space in a corner of the lot somewhat apart from the noisy side-show and menagerie tents. In this plot Maginnis had stretched the top of a small circular tent. The sides were not put up, and around the edge of the umbrella-shaped top were looped thick ropes of smilax, with bird cages containing bright singing canaries hanging at intervals among the loops. The greenhouses of the town

had been almost emptied to furnish a great many potted palms and other plants in big tubs which stood about singly and in clusters, and there was a great profusion of cut flowers in vases and jardinières. Maginnis would have nothing artificial in the decorations. The garlands of paper roses used in tableaux and pageants which some one suggested, he discarded scornfully. "We're goin' to have a bit of the rale thing for wanst," he declared.

Tommy and several of the other clowns were able to help a good deal when their turns on the program allowed them to be away, at intervals, from the rings. They were all acrobats, and so quick-witted and nimble that they could carry out Maginnis' orders much better and more quickly than the common workmen. They had worked to such good purpose that by four o'clock, just as the afternoon performance was over, all was ready, and when Ma Brown came soon after, with Cindy, she found a real "bower of beauty."

"Ain't it lovely! I knew you'd do somethin' wonderful, Maginnis," she cried. "But this just beats all."

"It'll do pretty well for a make-shift, ma'am,"

said the little man grinning. "I hope Madame Ossilena is comin', we need her to set things off loike."

Ma Brown's face fell as she answered, "Poor Loly's got one of her headaches, and she's stayin' at a hotel this afternoon. She was out in the hot sun too long this mornin', I guess. But she's let us have Cindy to help. Where you goin' to put the refreshments?" Maginnis showed her a row of ice cream freezers under a table almost hidden by large plants. In another alcove half a dozen musicians were ready to play on stringed instruments behind a screen of palms. "I declare, you've thought of everything. I don't believe Miss Damileau ever had a party so nice as this is goin' to be, and Nannie and Nattie will be tickled to death. I hope Tommy invited everybody," she continued, resting on a wicker sofa and spreading out the folds of her cool looking gray "summer silk" gown.

"Ye cudn't expect the workmen in their overalls the day ma'am. They're too busy for wan thing, and they'd be too shy to enjoy it if they did come."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Ma Brown with a

sigh. "But it's a pity that some folks always has to work while others get time to play."

"Ye can't help that ma'am, that's the way of the world. But ye needn't worry about our workmen. Every mother's son of 'em knows what's goin' on, and they're that pleased and excited to have their mascot given a party along wid the biggest star in the show. It's a pity our rules won't let 'em drink his health in the good old way. But it's all right. In 'Rome ye must do as the Romans do.' "

"If the Romans is temperance folks, I'm glad we're like 'em," said Ma Brown. "It wouldn't make our men enjoy Nattie's birthday party any more by gittin' boozy."

"Yer right, ma'am; of course ye are, and they'll all be satisfied with the taste of ice cream I'll give 'em."

By this time the performers were beginning to come. They had changed their clothing while the chariot races were ending the program, and had eaten supper, which was always served promptly at five o'clock. Mademoiselle Damileau came with her maid among the first. She was covered from head to foot with the light silk cloak she usually

wore on the grounds, and went at once to a little dressing room Maginnis had contrived behind a screen. Adele pinned some yellow daffodils in her dark hair and when she came out she made a striking and distinguished figure, although her gown was only a simple one of thin pale yellow organdie. The tears came to her eyes as she looked around at the pretty scene.

"I am dreaming, dear Madame, this cannot be true," she whispered, clasping Ma Brown's hand affectionately.

The "silver twins" were a little late, as Nannie besides dressing herself had to put the finishing touches on the toilet of her fastidious brother. But at last they came hurrying in, flushed and heated, but looking radiant and happy in their white costumes.

Nattie's bright hair lay in damp rings on his forehead. His cheeks were pink and his eyes bright. Nannie was very proud of him, and felt sure Miss Damileau had never seen any one so beautiful, as she led him up to be introduced. He had been trained by a dancing master in deportment and knew how to carry himself now. He

bowed politely in a composed manner, and looked inquiringly into Miss Damileau's eyes.

She was very much surprised, as she had expected to see a boyish figure and the face of a child with perhaps a vacant foolish expression, and here before her stood a big, handsome fellow, entirely self-possessed, looking like a college athlete; and yet she knew he could neither hear nor speak.

An English or American person might, perhaps, have had a moment of embarrassment, but the French star knew just what to do. She did not try to talk to him. She simply smiled cordially and holding out both hands to the young man, pulled him gently to her side and asked Nannie to stand at his left.

Tommy was waiting for the three to be in line, and immediately placed on each head a small wreath of myrtle leaves. He had asked Maginnis to allow him to do this, explaining that the old Greeks wore wreaths and garlands at their festivals.

The little man thought it an excellent idea, agreeing that myrtle should be used for the hon-

ored guests, and had then provided wreaths of daisies for the young girls and little children, and oak leaves for the adults. Every one on entering had been crowned, and at last was ready for the birthday party to begin. Maginnis, as master of ceremonies, darted about among the guests forming them in line. The orchestra was already playing softly, and Doctor Kelly with Ma Brown on his arm, led the procession to offer birthday congratulations.

Maginnis had left the matter of presents to the "Big Six," making them a committee to raise the necessary money, and to select and buy the gifts, and so well had they done their work that every employee, from the manager to the cooks and hostlers had been asked to contribute. Every one had thought it a privilege to give something, so that there had been plenty of money to buy three beautiful rings. Ma Brown was asked to present them, which she did in the simplest way. "It ain't no time for speech-makin'," she said, when the committee proposed to make the occasion a ceremonious one, "Nannie 'ud hate it. You just leave it to me."

"Here, honey, this is to remember us by," she

said, handing each one of the three a little jeweler's box and then hurrying along before there was time for them to say a word.

There were smiles and cordiality enough to satisfy even Nattie, as the guests trooped past, from the bluff and hearty good wishes of Doctor Kelly to the polite and soft voiced salutations of the Italian and French people.

"Now, ma'am, will ye be leadin' the dance," said Maginnis, coming up to Damileau after she had kissed all the children.

She held out her hand to Nattie, who understood by a sign from his sister what was expected of him. Tommy led out Nannie, and in a moment a dozen couples were waltzing among the birds and plants on the velvety turf, like happy children in a garden.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FREAKS

AB and Addy were very much interested in the party and wanted to help, but Maginnis had sent them away, saying they were not needed. They had been allowed to go as often as they pleased to the afternoon performances in the big tent. They went every day at first, but after a while they grew tired of seeing the same feats performed over and over, and preferred to spend their time in the side-shows where they had many friends among the kind and simple hearted "freaks." Ma Brown, too, knew most of these people very well, and on the day of the fête had told the children to invite them all to attend. Much to her surprise, the invitation was declined by every one. Some had excuses, while others merely shrugged their shoulders, but every one had a suspicious air.

Addy was very much puzzled and disappointed. "Why won't anybody go to the party?" she asked her particular friend, the tattooed lady.

"I guess the folks that gives it didn't want us very much or they wouldn't send the invitation that way," she replied in an offended tone.

"But they only thought of it at noon today. There wasn't time for any other way," argued Addy, "and I know grandma wants you. She said to tell you to be sure to come."

"Everybody ain't like dear old Ma Brown," remarked the fat woman, who sat near enough to take part in the conversation. "I guess you'd find the ring performers'ud stick up their noses if any of us was to go to their party."

"I think I see the trapeze ladies or Damileau shakin' hands with the likes o' us," said the "sword swallower," who had come up with Ab's hand in his, and now stood by Addy's side looking very scornful.

"Would you go to the party if Miss Damileau invited you?" asked Ab, looking up into his face quickly.

"I sure wouldn't go on any other invite," he answered emphatically.

The child slipped away without saying anything more, and Addy settled down on a stool by the side of her friend, taking from her little bag

a ball of cotton yarn and a crochet needle. "Do you think you could teach me that new stitch to-day, Mrs. Steegle?" she asked, presently.

"Yes, dear, of course I can," she answered kindly. "It's so hot today there won't be very many in to look at us, I guess. Just wait till the professor git's through showin' me off. Then I can set down and teach ye."

She stood up while the "lecturer" called attention in a loud voice to the wonderful blue landscapes, the ships and anchors and the animals on her face, arms and shoulders. A crowd of people looked at her curiously for a moment and then passed on to see and shudder, as the snake charmer wound a big python round her body, and the tattooed lady sat down smilingly to teach the new stitch.

Ab ran to the dressing tent and asked for Miss Damileau. The guard at the entrance knew her, and inquired at once if the artiste would see her, coming back in a moment to say she was to go right in. She found her as she expected, dressed and ready for her act. She was seated in an alcove made by a screen, and looked up from a book she was reading, saying, with a smile, as she held

out her hand to Addy, "What can I do for you, chéri?"

Ab told her hurriedly of the situation, and begged her to write an invitation to the side-show people as the only means of making them go to the fête.

She laughed merrily. "And they too think me 'stuck up'. Ah, I must see what I can do. Bring me my writing things, Adele."

The maid took a small portfolio from a suit case and placed it in her mistress' hands. The artiste took from it a fountain pen, and spread out a sheet of paper, then after a moment's thought she wrote a few lines which she read to Ab.

"Mlle. Damileau presents her compliments to her friends of the side-show and begs them to do her the honor of attending her birthday fête this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you, that's very nice; I'm sure they'll go now," said Ab, seizing the note and running away with it.

The freaks were thrown into great excitement when it was passed round among them, as they read the words over and over, hardly believing it

possible that the great "star" had so descended to their level.

"I always said she was a lady," remarked the living skeleton; "you could see that by looking at her."

"You don't think she sent this to make fun of us," queried the fat woman doubtfully.

"Why, no, course not! How suspicious you are, Sissy," said the tattooed Mrs. Steegle. "I'm going anyway. That is," she added, her face falling a little, "if I can get my new dress finished."

"I don't see how ye can, Hatty. You got a lot to do on it yet, hain't ye?" said Sissy, "and ye know they won't let ye do nothin' but fancy work in show hours."

"It's all done but the bottom ruffle and sewin' in the sleeves. The ruffle is pinned on. I could wear it that way on a pinch, but I'd be afraid to go with the sleeves just basted in."

"Hain't ye got something else to wear?"

"Not a rag. I'll have to give up goin' if I can't finish my dress."

"That's too bad," said her friend sympathizingly. "I'd do it fer ye while ye was slickin' up

if 'twan't so hot today; but a needle 'ud melt in my fingers in this heat."

"Let me do it, Mrs. Steegle," said Addy. "I know how to sew. Aunt Clara taught me."

"You, dearie! Why, a little girl can't do dress-makin'. But it's awful sweet of you to offer, and I'm just as much obliged."

"Why don't ye let her try, Hatty? You said the sleeves is basted in. It's no trick to do the back stitchin'; I bet she kin do it."

"Yes, do let me try. Where is the dress?" urged Addy.

"Well, it would be awful nice if ye could do part of it, anyway, and as Sissy says, it won't do no harm to try."

She pointed to a pasteboard box behind her, which Addy opened, taking out the unfinished garment, a thin lawn, with a white ground covered thickly with clusters of large purple flowers. In the box were also needle, thread and thimble. Addy partly filled the latter with paper to make it fit her finger, and was soon seated on a stool as much out of sight as possible, and began to sew busily. In a few moments she showed some neat stitches to her friend.

“Well, I declare!” she exclaimed. “Your sew-in’ beats mine all hollow! Ain’t she the *sweetest*,” she said, turning to her fat neighbor.

Sissy had to stand up now, turning about to show her ponderous body as the lecturer told her history and weight to the gaping crowd. The tattooed lady came next, and then the snake charmer, the sword swallower, the two-headed boy, and all the rest, rising in turn to be looked at or to perform their tricks. But at last the bands stopped playing. It was five o’clock; business was over, and everybody was free until time for the evening performance.

Ab had also been busy that afternoon in the small dressing tent of the freaks, helping her friends get ready for the fête. She had sewed a loose button on the worn frock coat of the living skeleton, and had blacked his boots for him. She had put the studs into a clean shirt for the “lecturer,” and helped to decide the important question whether a green or red necktie should be worn. She had run on several errands for the sword swallower, and the snake charmer, and then she and Addy, to save time, had eaten a hasty supper at the table of the side-show people.

Ma Brown took a great deal of pride in keeping her little maids nicely dressed. In warm weather they wore white dresses which were changed daily after the parade, so they had only to wash their faces and hands and brush their hair to be ready to go with the side-show people who had decided to accept the invitation.

There were only a few of them after all. Sissy said it was out of the question for her to go, because the day was so warm she would have to sit in the coolest place she could find and fan herself until time for the evening performance. The Circassian Queen, the Albinos, the frog-headed boy and several others were entirely too bashful to think of going. There were only the lecturer, the living skeleton, the tattooed lady, the sword swallower and the snake charmer, to dress for the important occasion.

The two men were ready at half-past five, but the ladies were so agitated and excited they made bungling work of dressing, and were late when the hooking and pinning and hair frizzing were finished, and they joined their impatient companions.

The dancing had begun, but Ma Brown received

them with a hearty welcome and in a few moments Mlle. Damileau came up with Nannie and shook hands with them all, giving each a smile and a word, trying to make them feel at home in spite of their shy silence. When at last they moved off across the lawn, they all clung together, and the little girls thinking they could take care of themselves now, began to help Adele and Cindy pass the lemonade and ices.

CHAPTER XXV

A LITTLE COMEDY

THE reception had been over-crowded, and many of the company drifted to the grass outside where chairs, settees, and tables were scattered about for their use. The party was on the east side of the big tent, which at this hour made a shade from the hot July sun. Guards had been stationed at intervals to keep curious outsiders away, so that they were entirely secluded.

Women and children, dressed in light summer gowns, flitted about in pairs or groups, chatting with men in duck or flannel suits, everybody apparently happy and carefree. It all looked to Tommy Benton exactly like a garden party, on the lawn at home. He was saying this to Ma Brown, when suddenly a comedy that was not on the program began to be acted before their astonished eyes, and which at first neither of them understood in the least. When Adele found how un-

just in her thoughts she had been to Nick, she was very unhappy and remorseful, as Mademoiselle Damileau had already told Ma Brown. The matter was in the poor girl's thoughts so much that one night she had a dream about it, in which her old priest at home appeared and told her he would forgive her sin when she had kneeled at the young man's feet and begged him to forgive her. Her mistress had tried to reason with her to show that she had not been to blame, that it was a mistake and not a fault, and that she was making too much of it. But Adele believed firmly in dreams, and was sure she would never be happy until she obeyed the priest's commands.

She had tried several times to perform her penance, but Nick was thoroughly afraid of her after the first attempt, and always ran away when he saw her coming toward him. But today, just as she was handing Ma Brown an ice, she caught a glimpse of him lurking behind a big palm, and made up her mind in a flash that he could not escape her this time. She was as impulsive as her mistress. With a wild cry of "Ah, mon Dieu," she dropped her tray of ices, and darted through the crowd. Ma Brown and Tommy were much

startled and mystified as their eyes followed her white cap and gown, which in a moment were swaying about as though she was struggling with some one. They could hear her shrill, excited tones, and then a terrified cry in another voice arose and Nick came rushing toward them, his face white and his eyes wide opened and frightened, as he sank on the grass by Ma Brown's side and tried to hide in the folds of her dress. Adele was close behind, still shrieking and trying to grasp his arm. But Nick found, most unexpectedly, that he had two friends and protectors in his distress. Since the morning he had good-naturedly helped her to punish the keeper for teasing her, Cindy had changed her feeling for Nick. She had disliked him because, as he was usually grinning, she had imagined he was laughing at her. But now she believed she had been mistaken, and wished to show her friendliness. Here was an opportunity. She sprang in front of him, saying roughly to Adele, "What you goin't do to our Henny! He ain't done you no ha'am."

Adele was furious at this interference. She seized Cindy's shoulder and tried to pull her away. But the black girl was quick, and now very

angry, and began to strike the French maid with all her strength.

Tommy and several other men separated the girls quickly, and Ma Brown gasped, "What on earth does it all mean?"

"I don't understand what she's driving at," said Tommy, who had been listening to Adele's hysterical words. "It's all about 'forgiveness' and 'penance,' but she's crying so I can't make anything out of it. It's too much for *my* French."

Miss Damileau had caught a glimpse of Adele and had heard her weeping, and now ran up to the group very much alarmed, to see what was the matter.

Ma Brown understood now. She was laughing heartily and said at once, "Your girl has scared Henny as much as he ever did her! It's tit for tat, I guess."

"Ah, I understand," said the artiste quickly; "Adele will never rest until she has kneeled and begged this young man's forgiveness. I can do nothing to prevent her; she is very foolish."

"Then hadn't she better do it now and have it over with?" said Ma Brown. "You heard what

Miss Damyloo said, Henry. Stand up now and let the girl have her say. She won't bother ye no more after that."

"I don't know what she's talkin' about," said Nick, rising and still looking frightened.

"Never mind. I'll tell ye in a minute," said Ma Brown.

Miss Damileau brought the weeping girl up to him now. She fell on her knees, mumbled some incoherent words in French, and ran off to the dressing room still sobbing. Cindy looked on in open mouthed astonishment. She could not understand in the least what the scene meant.

"That poor French girl thought you was bad, Henny, because folks called you Imp, and she was afraid of you. She thought one day you was stealin' a baby. But when she found you was catchin' stray cats so Nattie wouldn't see 'em, she saw she was mistaken and she was bound to tell ye she was sorry."

Nick looked very much relieved and also embarrassed and ashamed. He said nothing, but slipped quickly out of sight, and Cindy began to cry.

"I'se sorry I done slapped dat air girl," she sobbed. "Why ain't ye tole me before what ye did Henny?"

"You go and tell her you're sorry," said Ma Brown.

"I don't know her fool talk, and she won't understand," objected Cindy.

"Well, never mind, Miss Damyloo will tell her I guess. You run along now to Miss Loly, she'll need ye."

When she was gone, Mademoiselle Damileau laughed heartily with the others when Ma Brown explained the funny misunderstanding to the puzzled people who had seen the quarrel and could not guess what it was all about.

"You couldn't ask for a better little comedy, Mademoiselle," said Tommy.

"That is true. It was most amusing, and it has at last given peace of mind to my poor Adele. It makes this beautiful fête quite perfect. I have not been so happy since I was a child."

"Others too seem to think it's a success, also," remarked Tommy, looking toward a group on the grass.

Nannie was standing with an arm around one

of the English girls in a very chummy fashion, and both were watching Nattie who was absorbed in playing games with Ab and Addy and half a dozen foreign children.

“Ah, how charming are the ‘silver twins,’ ” cried Damileau. “He is so beautiful, so good, so innocent, and his sister is sweet and simple and modest, and yet a week ago I did not know them!”

“Children, have ye had a good time at the birthday party?” asked Ma Brown, looking round beamingly from her easy chair.

“Fine!” “Lovely!” “Beautiful!” “Splendid!” came from all directions.

“Well, I think it’s been pretty nice, too, but there’s one thing I miss.”

“Tell me what it is, ma’am, and ye shall have it if money’ll buy it,” said Maginnis.

“It can’t be bought,” replied Ma Brown, shaking her head. “It’s all out o’ fashion, and I s’pose folks now-a-days thinks it’s silly. But when I was young we never thought we could have a party without our all singin’ together.”

“That’s a bully idea,” exclaimed Sammy, who was standing near, “I’m sure it was a proper caper for the old Greeks. Suppose you sing us

one of your songs, Ma Brown. We can learn it in a jiffy and all sing it together.”

She had to be urged a little, but they were all so kind and affectionate she thought of them as her own children, and at last consented, beginning in a husky cracked voice which had once been sweet, to sing one of her old favorite songs. As Sammy predicted the company learned the simple words and melody very quickly. Nannie and her companion came running up to join in the chorus, which in a few minutes they were all singing, as Ma Brown smilingly rapped the time with her spectacle case on the arm of her chair.

“Oh come, come away! from labor now reposing,
Let busy care a while for bear,
Oh come, come away!
Oh come where love will smile on thee,
And round thy heart will gladness be
And time fly merrily,
Oh come, come away.”

“Now sweet Philomel, the weary traveler cheering
With notes of song, the day prolong,
Oh come, come away,—”

The loud notes of a bugle rose above the hearty singing. It was the call to the dressing tents. Clowns, jugglers, trapeze performers, tumblers,

and all the rest must hurry away to be ready for the evening performance.

There was only time for a hasty good-by, and the birthday fête was over.

“ ’Twas a bit of ‘Arcady,’ ma’am, and I never thought to see the day,” said Maginnis, as he clasped Ma Brown’s hand.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE children were growing tired of the circus, and were beginning to long for the freedom of the country. The noise and tinsel and the constant change, the rough language and hard work of tired people about them was rather depressing, and there was very little fun left for them. They had grown so used to the parades and performances in the rings, that their charm was all gone, and they wondered how they ever could have thought them beautiful and interesting. On the other hand, they were sorry to part with their friends among the circus people who had been kind to them, and they loved Ma Brown very much. Addy could not speak of leaving her without tears. She had not told them of her plan to adopt them—and they expected in three days to say good-by to her—perhaps forever.

“I just wish’t you were goin’ with us,” said the little girl one morning as she sat close to Ma Brown with her head on her shoulder.

“Do ye think Mr. Higgins would take me, too?” she asked smiling and patting her hand.

“Oh dear!” Addy wailed. “I just wish’t we didn’t have to go there. I just hate to live with strangers.”

“Well, now, perhaps ye’ll like ’em first rate,” said the old woman, encouragingly. “And then maybe sometime your folks will let ye come to see me in Ioway. How’d ye like that?”

“Oh, that ’ud be just splendid,” cried Addy, jumping up and clapping her hands. “We’ve got money enough to pay our fare there,” remarked Ab showing in her own way how much she wanted to go.

Ma Brown laughed, saying, “I guess ye won’t have to spend it that way, honey. I got lots o’ money, and I’ll pay yer way.”

“Do you think we can go soon?” asked Addy anxiously.

“We’ll see, dearie; there’s no tellin’ what’ll happen to any o’ us. But perhaps it won’t be so very long before I have ye there, and I know ye’ll have a nice time on my big farm.”

“Oh, I know we will, and I hope it’ll be awfully soon,” cried the ardent little girl, kissing her

good-by as she and Ab started for the parade.

The letter from the aunt, which Ma Brown had begun to look for anxiously, came that morning, and gave her a great deal of hope, and she could not help feeling encouraged by its tone, although no promises were made.

“Your pastor has written us of your proposition,” she wrote, “and my husband and I are very much interested. But before deciding such an important matter we would like to talk it over with you. Can you not come with the children, when they return, and we would decide then?”

Ma Brown hurried away to tell the good news to Lola, and arrange for the journey, for she was sure her daughter would approve of her making it. But to her surprise Lola objected. “Ye ain’t well enough to take that trip, Ma,” she said. “You know it’s awful hard to git to them out o’ the way little places. It ’ud be too hard on ye ridin’ nights perhaps on little dinky trains. Doc Kelly says yer awful run down, and he thinks you’d better go straight to Ioway on a Pullman as soon’s ye can.”

“That’s awful nice,” said her mother, “and I’m

just homesick for the farm. But I hate to leave you, daughter," she went on, "and I guess you'd miss me some, wouldn't ye?"

"But Hank wants me to go with ye. He thinks I need a change, too."

"Oh, Loly that's too good to be true," cried Ma Brown. "But ain't it too bad to go off before ye do yer new stunt with all them fine clothes? I want to see ye in 'The Empress of the Ring' awful bad."

"Oh, that'll keep till I get back," said Lola carelessly. "But now about yer takin' these kids home, I don't believe Doc Kelly would allow that."

"Well, what shall we do," said her mother, anxiously. "I want these children dretful bad, and I'm most sure I'd get 'em if I could see the aunt."

"I mean ye shall have 'em Ma," said Lola. "We'll have to fix it somehow. Let's go over to Doc Kelly's—he's awful smart. Perhaps he'll help us out."

When they were seated in his office, and the matter was laid before him, the doctor said at once, "Why don't you have the aunt come here?"

"That's so," exclaimed Lola, "I hadn't thought of that."

"But I don't believe she could leave her family," objected Ma Brown. "Besides, she's awful poor. She couldn't afford it nohow."

"Send her the money," said the doctor, promptly. "It wouldn't cost any more for her to come here than for you to go there."

"I wonder if she'd do it," said Ma Brown, still hesitating.

"Course she would," said the doctor, emphatically. "And what's more, I'll write her a letter that'll fetch her."

"Oh, if ye only would, Teddy. I'd be so glad," cried Ma Brown, looking very happy.

"I'll do it this minute," he said, sitting down to his desk and drawing paper toward him.

"And I'll go home and write a check and send it right over for you to put it in the letter," said Ma Brown, rising.

"That's a good idea," said the doctor, as she and her daughter walked away, leaving him to write his "fetching" letter.

The circus trains were sometimes side tracked in a quiet, secluded spot, often near the tents.

Then again they were obliged to stand in a railway yard beside other trains, with crowds of people coming and going from curiosity or on business, so that there could be no privacy, and no possibility of giving Jennie Lind any out of doors life, without going some distance away.

This was the state of things on that hot July day, when the tents were pitched in the outskirts of a large town in New York.

Ma Brown had been busy as usual since early morning with her various cares and household duties. After her return from her visit to the doctor she fed the cat and chickens, while Cindy cleaned the parrot's cage, and now she felt rather tired as she sat fanning her broad red face, while she waited for Nick, who was to carry Jennie Lind's cage to a shaded spot, where they could all have a quiet hour, and where the little chicks could scratch in the dirt. This outing was often taken on hot days, and Nick had been detailed for an escort at Ma Brown's request.

He was generally prompt to appear at the appointed hour, but today, he was late, and Ma Brown was beginning to wonder if he was going to fail her, when Maginnis appeared, unshaven

and haggard, and without his usual joking salutation.

“Will ye have me the day to carry yer ould hin for ye?” he began. “I injuced the young spalpeen to let me take his place this wanst. He’s comin’ for ye in an hour. I tould him we’d leave word here where to find us.”

Ma Brown looked at the red eyes and trembling hands of the little man, and knew he had been drinking too much, and had come to her for sympathy and perhaps help. But she only said cheerfully:

“Why, yes, of course, Maginnis. Glad to have ye. You set there on the steps a minute and I’ll soon be ready.”

Fortunately for her purpose there was a kettle of boiling water in her pantry. She hastened to put a large handful of ground coffee in a pot, poured hot water over it, and placed the pot over the flame of a small kerosene stove. She then put on her hat leisurely, got out her sun umbrella, and strapped together a roll of cushions and rugs, while Cindy took down Jennie Lind’s cage and helped to tie the green cloth securely over the wires. By this time the coffee was ready, and

Ma Brown poured out a large cup full of the strong, steaming liquid, and handed it to Maginnis, saying kindly :

“Here’s some nice hot coffee for ye. It’ll do ye good, I guess.”

The man drank it eagerly, and said, as he set down the cup : “May the Blessed Virgin be with ye ma’am. Yer a saint to be prayed to.”

“Oh no!” laughed Ma Brown. “I ain’t no saint, Maginnis. We don’t hev them things in this country. You just call me plain Ma Brown. That’s good enough for me.”

The spot selected for the outing was perhaps a quarter of a mile from the circus grounds, on a small hill where there were two or three fine maple trees. Ma Brown was a good walker and they were soon settled on the rugs and cushions, in the cool shade, Jennie Lind clucking joyously, and her big family as noisy and happy as the mother.

Maginnis had hardly spoken on the way there. He sat now, with his knees drawn up and his head bowed on them, a very sorry picture of misery.

Ma Brown knew he wished to tell her something and said to open the way, “Well, Maginnis, the

old boy's been after ye again, hasn't he? I'm right sorry for ye."

Her simple, kind words were too much for the poor fellow. He burst out crying like a child. "It's no use ma'am," he sobbed. "I'm a lost soul. There's nothin' can save me. Not even the Blessed Virgin or you. And ye thried hard like the angel that ye are. I can't let the crayther alone whin it's round, and whin I get wan dhrop there's no stoppin'. I git crazy dhrunk, and act the fool, and I—."

"Has Bellman discharged ye, Maginnis?" interrupted Ma Brown, going straight to the core of the trouble.

"That he has, ma'am, and no wonder. I'm not for blamin' him. He can't keep a man in that risponsible place when he can't depind on him. He's tould me the marnin' I'd thried his patience just onct too often and he's given me the sack."

"What'll ye do, poor feller!" said his companion, pityingly. "Hev ye got any money to take ye to yer friends?"

"Not a rid cint, ma'am. The bye's cleaned me out last night. There's nothin' for it, but to tramp the streets like a beggar and go to the devil

as quick as I can.” He threw himself at full length on the grass and buried his face in his arms.

“Now look at me, Maginnis!” said Ma Brown, impressively. “I’m yer friend and I want to help ye. Will ye let me?”

The discouraged man lifted his sad tear-stained face to her and said brokenly, “There’s no use ma’am. Ye can’t do anything for me. I’m no good.”

“Yes, you be. You’re awful smart. Bellman says you’d get most anything you wanted if you’d only let drink alone.”

She took his fevered hand in hers, as she went on. “Now listen to me. Bellman and Loly give me more money than I can spend. It plagues me to have so much of it round. I want you should take enough to pay your way to Kansas, and have some to live on after ye get there.”

The man tried to speak, but she stopped him, saying, “Don’t say a word. Ye can take the money as a loan, if ye want to, and pay it back when ye git round to it. Now I’ve got a sister livin’ in a little town about fifteen miles from Topeky. She’s a nawful good woman, and she’d

be right glad to giv ye a home till ye got a start."

Maginnis could hope as swiftly as he despaired. He sprang to his feet saying eagerly, "Do ye think ma'am there'd be a chance for me in the West? I can turn me hand to almost annything, and I've often thought I'd like to go beyant the Mississippi. I've heard tales of the big pay, and work goin' beggin' in that counthry."

But before she could reply, his face fell again, and he added sadly, "But the dhrink would be there too. It's everywhere to curse a poor weak fool like me."

"No Maginnis!" Ma Brown spoke, excitedly. "That's just it. That's why I want ye should go to Kansas. Don't ye know that's a temperance state? Ye can't git liquor unless you go and hunt for it. I've heard that's what some folks does, and you can get it on the sly. But they ain't no open saloons on every corner, like they be here, to tempt pore weak men folks and boys. If you want to keep away from the stuff the law'll help ye. See?"

"I'm not worthy of your heavenly kindness, ma'am," said the man, humbly. "But I'll be

thankful to take up wid yer offer. Whin can I hav the money.”

“It’s right here,” said Ma Brown, taking a fat purse from a leather pocket, hanging under her gown.

She counted the amount they agreed upon into his hand and then said. “Why can’t ye go right off, Maginnis? I’ll write to my sister as soon as I get back. I’ve told her about you already, so she won’t be surprised to know yer comin’.”

There was nothing to prevent his starting that night at midnight. Ma Brown promised to tell no one of her interview with him or of his whereabouts. He agreed to write to her through her sister, and then clasped her hand for a good-by. He could not speak for he was sobbing again.

CHAPTER XXVII

NICK MAKES A PROMISE

AFTER Maginnis went away Ma Brown sat peacefully with her back against a tree, and though looking rather pale and tired, there was an unusually happy expression on her face.

“Ah, here ye be, Henny,” she said as the boy came up to her. “I know’d ye’d be along pretty quick to take good care o’ grandma. I don’t know what I’d do without ye.”

The boy grinned but said nothing, and she went on, “Come and set down for a spell, and let’s have a little visit. I hain’t seen ye for quite a while.”

He dropped on the grass some distance away and picking up a twig began to chew it. He was usually very silent, and seldom spoke except to answer questions. But today he began the conversation by asking: “What’s the matter of old Cock o’ the walk? I met him just now lookin’ kinder sick. He was all schrooched up. I guess he’s got the stomach ache.”

"Henny, you hadn't orter call him that bad nick-name," Ma Brown looked soberly over her glasses.

"Everybody else does," he replied, in self defense.

"It makes me feel bad to hear the names circus folks calls each other," said Ma Brown. "Now how do you like to be called 'Imp'?"

"I don't care, I'm used to it," said the boy sullenly.

"Pore child," said Ma Brown, kindly. "Ye ain't never had a ma, hev ye, let alone grandma? But never mind. I like ye, and it makes me feel sorry when folks says yer a bad boy."

The blood rushed to his face as the outcast looked toward her, and she continued, "Now I want ye to be good like my little brother Henny. Ye don't care if I call ye that name do ye? You look like him a lot, and sometimes you make me think I'm a little girl again runnin' round on the farm with my brothers and sisters."

Ma Brown wiped some tears away with her apron and there was silence for a few minutes. When she spoke again it was in a more cheerful tone.

"I've been talkin' with poor Maginnis. Ain't

it a pity he can't let liquor alone? His drinkin' just sp'iles everything fur him. You don't drink do you, Henny? I never see no signs of it about ye."

"No," said the boy, emphatically. "I never touch it."

"Well! ain't that good!" she said, joyfully. "I'll tell Hank. He'll be awful pleased."

"I don't smoke, either," said the boy, eagerly.

"You don't!" echoed Ma Brown. "Why, that tickles me to pieces. So many boys o' your age smokes. It's awful bad for 'em. It don't hurt men grown if they don't do too much of it. Now I like to see Hank enjoy his cigar after dinner. It's good for his nerves, but boys don't need it. There ain't no chance for 'em to be good, strong men if they smoke before they're of age."

The boy's face was almost transformed as she spoke. She had praised him. No one had ever done that before. He leaned toward her and seemed to be hanging on her words, but his expression changed to one of embarrassment and shame, and he looked down and began digging the ground with a stick as she added sadly:

“But all the same you pore child, there ain’t no chance fur ye as long as ye lie and cheat like ye do. If ye’d only quit that, and try to be honest, you’d make Ma Brown awful happy.”

He looked at her again with his lip quivering and tried to speak, but he remained tongue-tied as usual and she continued in her kind loving way.

“I know ye hain’t never had no chance, pore boy, and you’ve always lived with folks that haven’t done ye no good. The circus or the big city ain’t no place for boys like you, Henny. I just wish I could get ye out to Ioway where there ain’t so many folks rubbin’ against each other, and grabbin’ at everybody’s throat tryin’ to get the best of ’em!”

“I ain’t done nothin’ so dretful,” said Nick at last in a muffled tone.

“You’ve done lots o’ good things, Henny. I know you’re got a kind heart, but ye sp’ile it all by yer under handed ways. Now t’wa’n’t honest for you to tell that story about telephonin’ to the girls’ folks when ye first brought ’em in.”

Nick looked astonished and abashed for a moment, and then mumbled. “I wrote to their aunt

twice, and told her the kids was all right and earnin' money, and we was goin' to take 'em home pretty quick."

"I know ye did Henny, and it made me feel a lot better, than I did, for I found out ye didn't do no telephonin', and I thought ye meant to keep 'em without lettin' their folks know where they was, so's ye could make money out of 'em, and it made me just sick."

"But ye see I did let 'em know," began the boy.

"Yes, but ye didn't wait to see if they was willin' to have 'em do the stunt, and ye meant to fool us, too, because ye thought we wouldn't keep the kids unless ye did."

The boy saw there was no use in trying to defend himself further, he colored and looked ashamed while Ma Brown went on, "'Twa'n't square, Henny, ye know it 'twa'n't, and if I hadn't a telegraphed to their folks and written to 'em, we'd a got into dretful trouble, for what ye did was nothin' but kidnappin'."

"I didn't know that," said Nick, trembling. "I thought I fixed it all right with their folks."

"But ye know ye didn't do the straight thing

by us, even if ye thought their folks knew where they was. Now ye see ye'll never have no friends and nobody'll trust ye if ye keep on doin' such things."

He looked at her inquiringly and began, "Hev you—"

But she understood what he would ask, and said quickly, "No I hain't told nobody about it, because I know there wouldn't be any hope for ye if I did. They'd send ye to the penitentiary perhaps, and there wouldn't ever be no chance for ye again."

He was silent and she went on, "I thought if I could talk to ye and make ye see how dretful it is to be dishonest, ye would try to be decent and good."

Nick burst out crying at this. "It ain't no use," he sobbed, "ye might as well send me to the pen and be done with it. There ain't never been no chance fer me. Everybody hates me. You're the only one that ever spoke a kind word to me, and now I've lost you."

"Now see here, Henny," said Ma Brown, taking his hands in hers, "we hain't got much time to talk, it's late and we ought to be goin' home. Now

tell me all about yerself as fast as ye can. I want to help ye, and I can't do nothin' till I know about yer life."

Her loving kindness was like sunshine on ice. The boy's heart melted and he longed to tell her all the truth.

It was a short, sad story. He began with his earliest recollections in an orphan asylum where he had been placed as a foundling. No one had been unkind to him, but there had been no love or sympathy there. He was only a cipher among hundreds like him. Then as a "bound boy" he had known real hardships and cruelty, where he had learned to defend himself by lying and the use of his sharp wits. He had grown hardened at an early age by constant abuse and misunderstanding, and after running away from the Reform School where his adopted parents had placed him, he had worked in livery stables or with the circus.

"Ye pore child," said Ma Brown, pityingly. "It's a wonder ye're as good as ye be. But there's a chance fer ye yet. You're young, and if ye try hard to tell the truth and give up cheatin', ye can make a first rate man yet. Now I'll tell ye what

I'll do fer ye," she went on, rising and beginning to get Jennie Lind ready to be taken home. "I've got a farm in Ioway where I'll take ye if ye want to go, and I'll give ye a good home and a chance to earn yer way and have some schoolin'. Will ye try to be good and straight if I do this?"

"Yes, I'll try," whispered the boy, breathlessly, "I'll try awful."

"Well, then," said Ma Brown, beaming, "We won't say a word about the past any more, but just go ahead and start fresh, and as long's I live ye shall have a *home* anyway."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ACCIDENT

THE big tent was crowded with sweltering humanity that afternoon. Men sat on the narrow seats with their coats off, and their straw hats on the backs of their heads; women in shirt waists made themselves warmer than need be by the exercise of fanning their heated bodies, while myriads of children, too eager and excited to notice the heat, were watching with breathless interest the bewildering performances in the three rings.

The Japanese jugglers, the men and women tumblers and the tight rope walkers had gone through their difficult feats with clock-like precision, when there came a pause. The three rings were empty for a moment. The huge brass band, which had been playing noisily and incessantly, now changed the character of its music. It began a waltz in subdued strains, when Mademoiselle Damileau rode into the central ring. She was mounted on a glossy black horse of perfect proportions, with delicate head and legs. She was dressed in a black cloth riding habit, and wore a

black silk hat over her dark braids which were bound closely round her small head.

She bowed graciously when she was introduced as the "greatest living lady rider," and then brushing lightly the knees of her horse with her small whip began to make him keep step to the music.

The highly trained animal obeyed her lightest touch, and while she kept her seat as though she had been a part of him, he waltzed perfectly and gracefully around the ring, and afterward executed other and more difficult dancing steps.

She looked very elegant and graceful as she rode away, bowing her acknowledgment of the applause, and then the music changed, again becoming livelier, and a spirited white horse, with only a narrow red band round his body, dashed into the ring, and commenced to run at great speed. Damileau appeared almost at the same moment, and stood in the center of the ring, bowing and smiling to her four-sided audience. She was dressed this time in a plain tightly fitting gown of dull heavy pink silk, which reached to her ankles, showing her dainty pink shoes. Her glossy black hair was arranged without a puff or a curl.

She wore no ornaments, and looked exactly like a slender, simple, demure young girl, making the equestrians who had appeared before seem tawdry and commonplace.

With a light skimming movement she turned and seemed to fly toward the white horse, whose back she mounted as he ran, only touching the red girdle for an instant with her hand.

Like a thistledown she danced on his back, springing to the ground and again to her perch a dozen times. In one of her acts she took a small chair from an attendant, balanced it on the heaving back of the running horse, seated herself in the chair, and rode round the circle with her arms folded. Her somersaults and handsprings were performed with absolute precision and grace, and with a child-like playful air which made all her feats seem original and refined.

Lola sat in a box, as near the ring as possible, leaning forward to watch with absorbing attention every movement of the great artiste, with the hope of learning something of her secret if possible. But as usual she felt baffled. She did not understand how such simplicity could have so great a charm. She was sure she should never

be able to learn the secret of it, although she might master the amazing technique of her rival by working hard.

The scene lasted only a short time, and Damileau was running away from the applause, darting with her light step past Lola's box, when a little dog ran in front of her. She stumbled over him, and fell headlong, just in the path of a small white mule which a clown was driving into the ring at a rapid pace.

"Look out!" shouted Lola, springing over the railing of her box, and trying to draw the mule away. She was too late. One sharp little hoof had rested an instant on Damileau's slender ankle, and had broken a small bone.

When she was raised to her feet she could not stand, and turning away from all the attendants who crowded around, she laid her head on Lola's strong young shoulder and cried from the pain.

They carried her out quickly, the great audience not realizing in the least what had happened. Lola went with her in a carriage to the car of the artiste which no one beside herself or her servants ever entered.

Fortunately the doctor was in his office and

came at once to help place the sufferer on her white bed.

“Run and call Ma, Cindy,” said Lola, to her maid who was standing in the crowd around the door.

“She ain’t got back yet,” returned the girl quickly.

“Land! What’ll we do without her!” exclaimed Lola, helplessly.

The doctor knew what to do, and with the help of his assistant, and that of a trained nurse, began very quickly and skilfully to set the broken bone.

The French lady’s maid and the chef could not speak English, and were, besides, too frightened to be of much help. So Lola placed Cindy at the door as sentinel, and thinking she would not be needed any longer, started for her own quarters, when Damileau called to her beseechingly, “Ah, Madame, do not leave me!”

Lola’s heart was melted. She spoke in her mother’s own loving tones as she bent over the invalid. “No, honey,” she said, soothingly. “I’ll not leave you. Be a brave girl, now, and the doctor’ll soon make you all well!”

CHAPTER XXIX

GOING HOME

TWO days after the outing, Ma Brown was seated by her window in the morning, watching Jennie Lind and her brood scratching in the ground outside. Lola and the little girls had gone to the parade, and everything about her in the secluded spot where the train stood was as quiet as the country.

“Come in, Teddy,” she called to the doctor, who was passing. “Ye’re visitin’ Miss Damyloo so much now days I never git to see ye. I’m goin’ to be jealous before long.”

“She’s very forlorn,” said the doctor, stopping a moment by the open window.

“Yes, I know,” said Ma Brown. “Pore thing! She told me once she was lonesome. But she seems to be chirkin’ up some since we got acquainted. Loly and I thinks she’s jist lovely. You’d orter see Loly! You know she never does things by halves, and it seems like she can’t do enough for Miss Damyloo since she got hurt.”

“Mrs. Bellman’s all right,” said the doctor, heartily.

“I always told ye Loly had a good heart,” cried the mother, proudly. “Miss Damylloo found it out, too. She thinks all the world o’ Loly—you’d or-ter see ’em visitin’ together.”

“Yes, I’ve seen ’em,” said the doctor, “and it’s a fine thing for both of ’em.”

“How’s Miss Damylloo gittin’ on, doc?” asked Ma Brown. “Is she goin’ to be able to ride soon?”

“Not this season, I think. She’s so run down with work and the heat, she’ll be laid up longer than if she were in good condition. She needs a change. I’ve been trying to persuade her to go to the country for a while.”

“How’d she like to go to the farm with me, Teddy?”

“Why, what a splendid idea!” returned the doctor, looking much pleased. “I’m sure she’d be delighted to go with you. You’re all ready I suppose?”

“Yes, my trunk’s packed, and so’s Loly’s. We’re jist waitin’ to hear from the aunt. Do ye

suppose Miss Damylloo could get ready in short notice?"

"Sure!" said the doctor, confidently. "She's one of the prompt kind."

"I'm 'fraid she wouldn't want to go along with pore old me," said Ma Brown, smiling dubiously.

"Oh, Ma Brown, you make me tired," said the doctor, impatiently. "Why, she'd jump at the chance. I'll ask her this morning."

"No, ye better wait and let me talk it over with Loly first. I'm most sure she'd say yes, and we'll let her do the invitin'."

The doctor agreed to this and was turning to go, when a boy in blue uniform came up and put a telegram in his hand. He read it exclaiming, "Hooray, Aunt Clara's coming! She'll be here today. Didn't I tell you my letter would fetch her?"

"What did ye say in it, Teddy?" asked the old woman, anxiously. "Yer so good to me, I'm afraid ye praised me up too much, and she won't believe nothin' ye said when she sees me."

"Don't you worry," replied her companion, laughing. "I only told her the plain truth. I

said you'd been a real mother to the whole bunch of us, and I guessed you'd do for a grandmother to her kids. That's all true—isn't it?"

"I don't see why everybody's so good to me," said the old woman, humbly. "I'm sure I don't deserve them kind words. But I hope you told her that I've got a good farm to take the kids to, and that my neighbors has known me all my life, and they'll tell her I'll keep my word."

"Sure, I told her all that, and a lot more; but I won't tell you what it was for fear you'll be conceited."

She laughed as she shook hands at parting, and began to make some preparations to receive her important visitor.

Aunt Clara reached the circus before noon, coming a little sooner than she was expected. When Doctor Kelly took her to Ma Brown's car, she found the little girls outside and Ma Brown talking to them through the window. The children were very much astonished, and could hardly believe their eyes as the tall, dark-eyed woman came swiftly toward them. She was very thin and round shouldered, and wore clothes not at all fashionable. Her face was rather severe, but

she had such a strong expression of earnestness and sincerity, that before she had spoken a word Ma Brown decided that she would not be at all afraid of her, and felt sure she would like her.

Addy ran to meet her, exclaiming: "Oh, Aunt Clara! When did you get here—have you come to take us home?"

She kissed her nieces and said, without answering Addy's question, "Where is Mrs. Brown?"

"Here I be," said Ma Brown, appearing at the door, "and I'm right glad to see ye. Walk right in."

She shook her visitor's hand cordially, and pushed her gently into a chair and began to take off her hat as though she had always known her. The doctor saw he was no longer needed, and walked away; feeling sure Ma Brown could best manage her business with the newcomer alone.

"Is it possible that this is the circus," exclaimed Aunt Clara, looking around in astonishment at the homely furniture of the snug little room: the rag carpet, the old fashioned pictures, the little cane seated rocking chair, and the cat sleeping on the lounge.

“Yes! and ain’t it nice, Aunt Clara?” cried Addy.

“Yes, I think it is,” she said in her downright way.

Ab called her attention to Jennie Lind and her chicks outside, and Ma Brown said, laughing: “I’m right glad ye like things here, Mis’ Carter. It’s as near as I could git to a home travelin’ round as I do.”

“I think it’s wonderful,” said Mrs. Carter, taking her seat again. “I don’t see how you could do it.”

“I couldn’t,” said Ma Brown, quickly, “if I didn’t have such a good son-in-law.”

They all sat down then and chatted busily, when Aunt Clara told them that as soon as she received the doctor’s letter, her husband and the neighbors had insisted on her going at once to see Ma Brown. A trusted friend had promised to take good care of her lame boy and the baby, during her absence, so she had decided to come. She had taken a night train and expected to go home that night by another one, so that she would be away from her children only two nights and one day.

“So we’ll have to talk fast,” she said, turning to her hostess. “Have you told the children?”

“No. We thought we’d better wait till you came,” said Ma Brown.

“Well, they ought to know now,” said Aunt Clara. “Children, how would you like to go to Iowa to live with Mrs. Brown?”

“I’d like it!” shouted Ab, instantly.

Addy ran to Ma Brown and threw her arms around her neck exclaiming, “Oh! oh! oh! grand-ma Brown and not Mr. Higgins.”

“Well, we got *their* answer pretty quick,” said Ma Brown returning Addy’s hug, “and do ye really mean ye’ll give ’em to me,” she asked, the tears standing in her eyes.

“Yes,” said Aunt Clara, in her decisive way. “I made up my mind as soon as I saw you in this room. And now I think we’d better have a little talk by ourselves.”

“Yes, that’s so,” assented Ma Brown. “Now darlin’s ye better go and git yer dinners, and say good-by to yer friends. It’ll be a good time to see ’em all at the tables, and like as not we’ll start tonight. I’ll have a lunch fer yer Aunt and me right here. We can eat while we’re talkin’.”

“Where’ll we find Nick?” asked Ab.

“Never mind him, honey. He’s goin’ with us; and Cindy too, and Loly and Miss Damylloo and her girl. There’ll be a whole bunch of us,” she said, laughing.

When they were left alone it was soon arranged by the two women that Ma Brown would take Ab and Addy home with her for one year, as an experiment, before adopting them. She promised to send them to school regularly, and leave them in good hands when she traveled with the circus, and if she adopted them they were to be well provided for in her will.

Mrs. Carter expressed her satisfaction at the good fortune that had come to her sister’s orphan children, and Ma Brown hastened to say: “It’s awful good luck for me to git them dear little girls for my own. But I can’t help wonderin’ how ye came to trust me so quick, bein’ such a stranger.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Carter, “we didn’t altogether depend on your pastor’s letter or the doctor’s, although both of them were so favorable. We thought it was best to find out a little more about you, so we took some of the money you sent,

and telegraphed a night letter to the post master of your town in Iowa, and he telegraphed back the best kind of a recommendation."

"Well, well," said Ma Brown, much pleased. "That was Frank Sabine. We've known each other since we was children. It was right kind of him to do that for me, and I'm awful glad I've got a good name amongst my old neighbors."

Mr. and Mrs. Bellman came in for a moment now to meet Mrs. Carter, and she was introduced to Nannie Kirk and several other friends. Addy wanted her to see the freaks and the clowns, but she was in a hurry to go home, so late in the afternoon she said good-by to her nieces, who promised to write to her often, and turning to Ma Brown she grasped her hand warmly, saying in a husky voice: "I can't put in words what I want to say to you. You are a good woman."

"Ye couldn't say nothin' better'n that," said Ma Brown, returning the hand clasp, "and I promise to take just the best care I know how o' them dear children."

There seemed no reason why the party should not start that night. Adele had packed her mistress's trunk and her own that afternoon, and Nick

and Cindy had prepared Jennie Lind and her family and the other pets of Ma Brown's for the journey. Every one was ready, so they were all on the Pullman car bound for the West before bed time, after having said good-by to Mr. Bellman and the doctor at the station.

The "big six" had sent boxes of lovely flowers to the train for the travelers with friendly little notes wishing them a pleasant journey, and when Damileau saw them she buried her face among the roses exclaiming to Ma Brown:

"How beautiful! Ah, it is a dear country you have, Madame, with its kind friendly people."

They were all very happy except Addy who was a little sad and almost tearful as the train hurried her away to her new home.

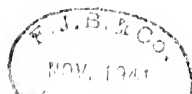
"I'm awful glad we're goin' to live with you," she said to Ma Brown as she kissed her good night in her berth. "But I wish't we didn't have to say good-by to people we like. I can't bear to think I'll never see Mrs. Steegle and Nannie Kirk and Tommy Benton and all the rest of 'em any more."

"But that's life, honey," said Ma Brown, cheerfully. "It's all meetin's and partin's in this

world wherever ye be—we can't help it. So there's no use cryin' about it, and the best thing we can do is to keep goin' ahead and bein' as chipper as we can.'"

THE END





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